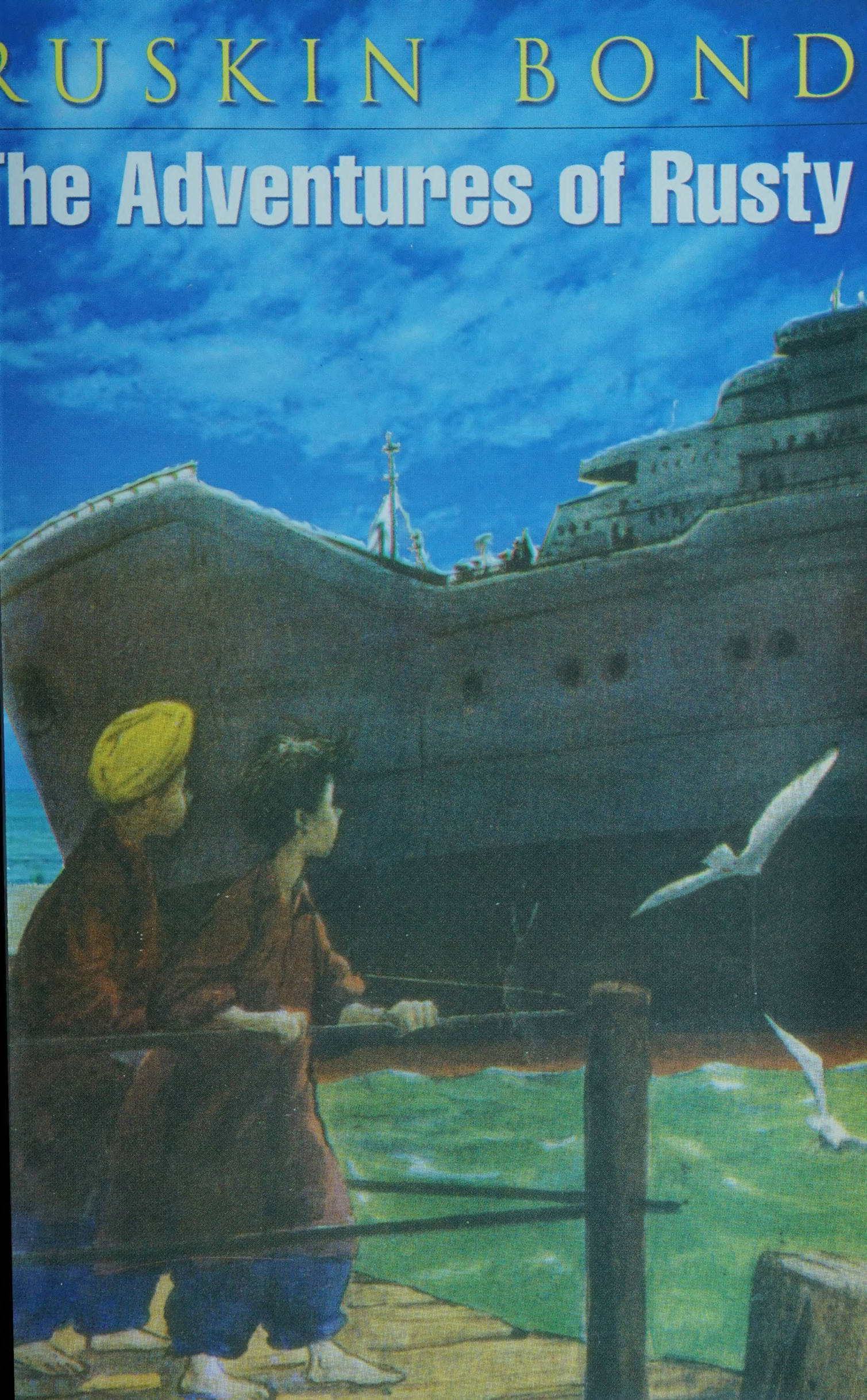
RUSKIN BOND

The Adventures of Rusty



Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

The Adventures of Rusty

Ruskin Bond

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Uncle Ken

Granny's Fabulous Kitchen

As kitchens went, it wasn't all that big. It wasn't as big as the bedroom or the living-room, but it was big enough, and there was a pantry next to it. What made it fabulous was all that came out of it; good things to eat like kababs and curries, chocolate fudge and peanut toffee, jellies and gulab jamuns, meat-pies and apple-pies, stuffed turkeys, stuffed chickens, stuffed eggplants, and hams stuffed with stuffed chickens!

Granny was the best cook in the world.

The town we lived in was called Dehradun. It's still there, though much bigger and busier since Independence. Granny had a house, a large rambling bunglow, on the outskirts of the town. In the grounds were many trees, most of them fruit trees—mangoes, lichees, guavas, bananas, papayas, lemons—there was room for all of them, including a giant jack-fruit tree casting its shadow on the walls of the house.

Blessed is the house upon whose walls
The shade of an old tree softly falls. . . .

I remember those words of Granny's. They were true words, because it was a good house to live in, especially for a nine-year-old with a tremendous appetite.

If Granny was the best cook in the world, I must have been the boy with the biggest appetite. And I was very

lucky, because not every boy has a grandmother who can cook like an angel. (That is, if angels do any cooking.)

Every winter, when I came home from boarding-school, I would spend at least a month with Granny before going on to spend the rest of the holidays with my parents in Assam, where my father was manager of a tea estate. The tea-gardens were great fun, but my parents couldn't cook. They employed a khansama—a professional cook—who made good mutton curry but little else. Mutton curry for dinner can be a bit tiring, especially for a boy who likes to eat almost everything.

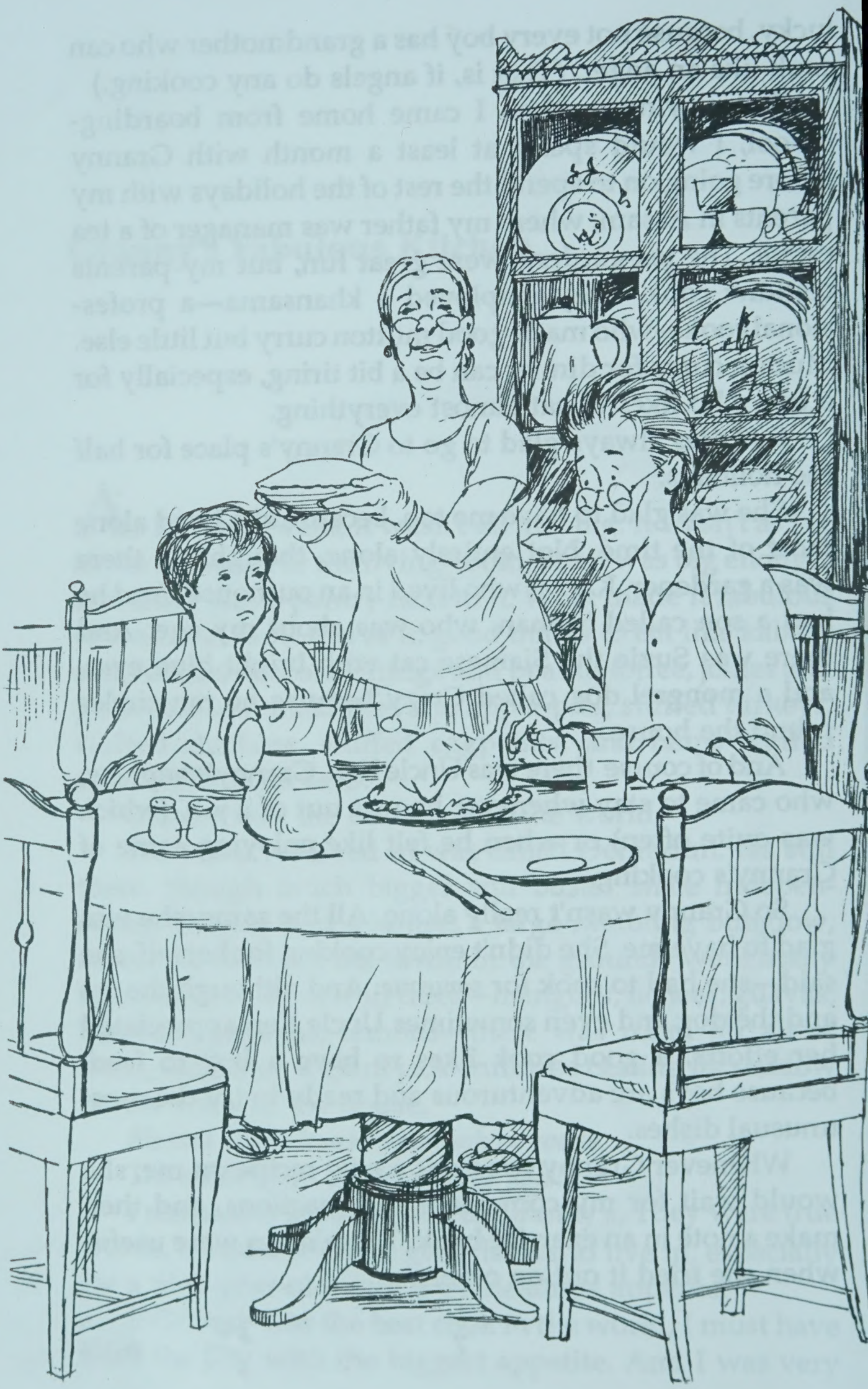
So I was always glad to go to Granny's place for half the holidays.

She was glad to have me too, because she lived alone most of the time. Not entirely alone, though. . . . there was a gardener, Kanta, who lived in an outhouse. And he had a son called Mohan, who was about my age. And there was Suzie the Siamese cat with bright blue eyes, and a mongrel dog called Crazy because he ran circles round the house.

And of course there was Uncle Ken, Granny's nephew, who came to stay whenever he was out of a job, (which was quite often) or when he felt like enjoying some of Granny's cooking.

So Granny wasn't really alone. All the same, she was glad to have me. She didn't enjoy cooking for herself, she said—she had to cook for *someone.* And although the cat and the dog and even sometimes Uncle Ken appreciated her efforts, a good cook likes to have a boy to feed, because boys are adventurous and ready to try the most unusual dishes.

Whenever Granny tried out a new recipe on me, she would wait for my comments and reactions, and then make a note in an exercise book. These notes were useful when she tried it out on others.



"Do you like it?" she'd ask, after I'd taken a few mouthfuls.

"Yes, Gran."

"Sweet enough?"

"Yes, Gran."

"Not *too* sweet?"

"No, Gran."

"Would you like some more?"

"Yes, please, Gran."

"Well, finish it off."

"Mmmm . . . . "

Roast Duck.

This was one of Granny's specialities.

The first time I had roast duck at Granny's place, Uncle Ken was there too.

He'd just lost a job as a railway guard, and had come to stay with Granny until he could find another job. He always stayed as long as he could, only moving on when Granny offered to get him a job as an assistant master in Padre Das's Academy for Small Boys. Uncle Ken couldn't stand small boys. They made him nervous, he said. I made him nervous too, but there was only one of me, and there was always Granny to protect him. At Padre Das's, there were over a hundred small boys.

Although Uncle Ken had a tremendous appetite, and ate just as much as I did, he never praised Granny's dishes. I think this was why I was angry with him at times, and why sometimes I enjoyed making him feel nervous.

Uncle Ken looked down at the roast duck, his glasses slipping down to the edge of his nose.

"Hmmm. . . . duck again, Aunt May?"

"What do you mean, 'Duck again'? You haven't had duck since you were here last month."

"That's what I mean," said Uncle Ken. "Somehow, one expects more variety from you, Aunt May."

All the same, he took two large helpings and ate most of the stuffing before I could get at it. I took my revenge by emptying all the apple sauce onto my plate. Uncle Ken knew I loved stuffing; and I knew he was crazy about Granny's apple sauce. So we were even.

"When are you joining your parents?" he asked hopefully, over the jam tart.

"I may not go to them this year, "I said." When are you getting another job, Uncle?"

"Oh, I'm thinking of taking a rest for a couple of months."

I enjoyed helping Granny and Ayah with the washing up. While we were at work, Uncle Ken would take a siesta on the verandah or switch on the radio to listen to dance music.

"And how do you like your Uncle Ken?" asked Granny one day, as she emptied the bones from his plate into the dog's bowl.

"I wish he was someone else's uncle," I said.

"He's not so bad, really. Just eccentric."

"What's eccentric?"

"Oh, just a little crazy."

"At least Crazy runs round the house," I said. "I've never seen Uncle Ken running."

But I did one day.

Mohan and I were playing marbles in the shade of the mango grove when we were taken aback by the sight of Uncle Ken charging across the compound, pursued by a swarm of bees. He'd been smoking a cigar under a simul tree, and the fumes had disturbed the wild bees in their hive, directly above him. Uncle Ken fled indoors and leapt into a tub of cold water. He'd received a few stings

and decided to remain in bed for three days. Ayah took his meals to him on a tray.

"I didn't know Uncle Ken could run so fast," I said later that day.

"It's Nature's way of compensating," said Granny.

"What's compensating?"

"Making up for other things. . . . Now at least Uncle Ken knows that he *can* run. Isn't that wonderful?"

Granny's Pickles

Whenever Granny made vanilla or chocolate fudge, she gave me some to take to Mohan, the gardener's son.

It was no use taking him roast duck or curried chicken, because in his house no one ate meat. But Mohan liked sweets—gulab jamuns, rasogullas, jalebies which were made with lots of milk and lots of sugar, as well as Granny's home-made English sweets.

We would climb into the branches of the jack-fruit tree and eat fudge of peppermints or sticky toffee. We couldn't eat the jack-fruit, except when it was cooked as a vegetable or made into a pickle. But the tree itself was wonderful for climbing. And some wonderful creatures lived in it—squirrels and fruit bats and a pair of green parrots. The squirrels were friendly and soon got into the habit of eating from our hands. They too were fond of Granny's chocolate fudge. One young squirrel would even explore my pockets to see if I was keeping anything from him.

Mohan and I could climb almost any tree in the garden, and if Granny was looking for us, she'd call from the front verandah and then from the pantry at the side of the house and finally from her bathroom window on the other side of the house. There were trees on all sides, and it was impossible to tell which one we were in, until we answered her call. Sometimes Crazy would give us away, by barking beneath our tree.

When there was fruit to be picked, Mohan did the picking. The mangoes and lichees came into season during the summer, when I was away at boarding-school, so I couldn't help with the fruit gathering. The papayas were in season during the winter, but you don't climb papaya trees—they are too slender and wobbly. You knock the papayas down with a long pole, and catch them before they hit the earth.

Mohan also helped Granny with the pickling. She was justly famous for her pickles. Green mangoes pickled in oil were always popular. So was her hot lime pickle. And she was equally good at pickling turnips, carrots, cauliflowers, chillies, and other fruits and vegetables. She could pickle almost anything, from nasturtium seed to jack-fruit. Uncle Ken didn't care for pickles, so I was always urging Granny to make more of them.

My own preference was for sweet chutneys and sauces, but I ate pickles too, even the very hot ones.

One winter, when Granny's funds were low, Mohan and I went from house to house, selling pickles for her.

In spite of all the people and pets she fed, Granny wasn't rich. The house had come to her from Grandfather, but there wasn't much money in the bank. The mango crop brought in a fair amount every year, and there was a small pension from the Railways (Grandfather had been one of the pioneers who'd helped bring the railway line to Dehra at the turn of the century) but there was no other income. And now that I come to think of it, all those wonderful meals consisted only of the one course, followed by a sweet dish. It was Granny's cooking that turned a modest meal into a feast.

I wasn't ashamed to sell pickles for Granny. It was great fun. Mohan and I armed ourselves with baskets filled with pickle bottles, then set off to cover all the houses in our area.

Major Clarke, across the road, was our first customer. He had red hair and bright blue eyes and was almost always good-humoured.

"And what have you got there, Rusty?" he asked.

"Pickles, sir."

"Pickles! Have you been making them?"

"No, sir, they're my grandmother's. We're selling them, so we can buy a turkey for Christmas."

"Mrs Bond's pickles, eh? Well, I'm glad mine is the first house on your way, because I'm sure that basket will soon be empty. There's no one who can make a pickle like your grandmother, son. I've said it before and I'll say it again, she's God's gift to a world that's terribly short of good cooks. My wife's gone shopping, so I can talk quite freely, you see. . . . What have you got this time? Stuffed chillies, I trust. She knows they're my favourite. I shall be deeply wounded if there are no stuffed chillies in that basket."

There were, in fact, three bottles of stuffed red chillies in the basket, and Major Clarke took all of them.

Our next call was at Miss Kellner's house. Miss Kellner couldn't eat hot food, so it was no use offering her pickles. But she bought a bottle of preserved ginger. And she gave me a little prayer-book. Whenever I went to see her, she gave me a prayer-book, and it was always the same one.

Further down the road, Dr Dutt, who was in charge of the hospital, bought several bottles of lime pickle, saying it was good for his liver. And Mr Hari, who owned a garage at the end of the road and sold all the latest cars, bought two bottles of pickled onions and begged us to bring him another two the following month.

By the time we got home, the basket would usually be empty, and Granny richer by twenty or thirty rupees—enough, in those days, for a turkey.

Uncle Ken stayed for Christmas and ate most of the turkey.

"It's high time you found a job," said Granny to Uncle Ken one day. "There are no jobs in Dehra," complained Uncle Ken.

"How can you tell? You've never looked for one. And anyway, you don't have to stay here forever. Your sister Emily is headmistress of a school in Lucknow. You could go to her. She said before that she was ready to put you in charge of the dormitory."

"Bah!" said Uncle Ken. "Honestly, Aunt May, you don't expect me to look after a dormitory seething with forty or fifty demented small boys?"

"What's demented?" I asked.

"Shut up," said Uncle Ken.

"It means crazy," said Granny.

"So many words mean crazy," I complained. "Why don't we just say crazy. We've a crazy dog, and now Uncle Ken's crazy too."

Uncle Ken clipped me over the ear, and Granny said, "Your Uncle isn't crazy, so don't be disrespectful. He's just lazy."

"And eccentric," I said. " I *heard* he was eccentric."

"Who said I was eccentric?" demanded Uncle Ken.

"Miss Leslie," I lied. I knew Uncle Ken was fond of Miss Leslie, who ran a beauty parlour in Dehra's smart shopping centre.

"I don't believe you," said Uncle Ken. "Anyway, when did you see Miss Leslie?"

"We sold her some mint chutney last week. I told her you liked mint chutney. But she said she'd bought it for Mr Houghton who's taking her to the pictures tomorrow."

Uncle Ken Does Nothing

To our surprise, Uncle Ken got a part time job as a guide, showing tourists the 'sights' around Dehra.

There was an old fort near the river bed; and a sixteenth century Hindu temple; and, about ten miles into the foothills, the hot sulphur springs.

Uncle Ken told us he was taking a party of six American tourists, husbands and wives, to the sulphur springs. Granny was pleased. Uncle Ken was busy at last! She gave him a hamper filled with ham sandwiches, home-made biscuits and a dozen oranges—ample provision for a day's outing.

The sulphur springs were only ten miles from Dehra, but we didn't see Uncle Ken for three days.

He was a sight when he got back. His clothes were dusty and torn; his cheeks were sunken; and the little bald patch on top of his head had been burnt a bright red.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" asked Granny.

Uncle Ken sank into the armchair on the verandah. "I'm starving, Aunt May. Give me something to eat."

"What happened to the food you took with you?"

"There were seven of us, and it was all finished on the first day."

"Well, it was only supposed to last a day. You said

you were going to the sulphur springs."

"Yes, that's where we were going," said Uncle Ken. "But we never reached them. We got lost in the hills."

"How could you possibly have got lost in the hills? You had only to walk straight along the river bed and up the valley. . . . *You* ought to know, you were the guide and you'd been there before."

"Yes, I know," said Uncle Ken, looking crestfallen. "But I forgot the way. That is, I forgot the valley. I mean I took them up the wrong valley. And I kept thinking the springs would be at the next turn in the river, but it wasn't the same river. . . . So we kept walking, until we were in the hills, and then I looked down and saw we'd come up the wrong valley. We had to spend the night under the stars. It was very cold. And next day I thought we'd come back a quicker way, through Mussourie, but we took the wrong path and reached Kempti instead. . . . And then we walked down to the motor-road and caught a bus."

I helped Granny put Uncle Ken to bed, and then I helped her make him a strengthening onion soup. I took him the soup on a tray, and he made a face while eating it and then asked for more. He was in bed for two days while Ayah and I took turns taking him his meals. He wasn't a bit grateful; but I suppose some uncles are like that. . . . they just won't grow up.

"Eat well, but don't overeat," Granny used to tell me. "Good food is a gift from God, and like any other gift, it can be misused."

She'd made a list of Kitchen Proverbs and pinned it to the pantry door—not so high that I couldn't read it, and not so low that Uncle Ken couldn't read it, either.

These were some of the proverbs:

Light suppers make long lives.

Better a small fish than an empty dish.

There is skill in all things, even in making porridge.

Eating and drinking shouldn't keep men from thinking.

Dry bread at home is better than roast meat abroad.

A good dinner sharpens the wit and softens the heart.

Let not your tongue cut your throat.

When Uncle Ken complained that he was losing his hair and that his bald patch was increasing in size, Granny looked up her book of old recipes and said there was one for baldness which *her* grandfather had used with great success. It consisted of a lotion made with gherkins soaked in brandy. Uncle Ken said he'd try it.

Granny soaked some gherkins in brandy for a week, then gave the bottle to Uncle Ken with instructions to rub a little into his scalp morning and evening.

Next day, when she looked into his room, she found only gherkins in the bottle. Uncle Ken had drunk all the brandy.

Uncle Ken liked to whistle.

Hands in his pockets, nothing to do, he would stroll about the house, around the garden, up and down the road, whistling feebly to himself.

It was always the same whistle, tuneless to everyone except my uncle. . . .

"What are you whistling today, Uncle Ken?" I'd ask.

"Ol' Man River. Don't you recognize it?"

And the next time around he'd be whistling the same notes, and I'd say, " Still whistling Ol' Man River, Uncle?"

"No, I'm not. This is Danny Boy. Can't you tell the difference?"

And he'd slouch off, whistling tunelessly. Sometimes it irritated Granny.

"Can't you stop whistling, Ken? It gets on my nerves. Why don't you try singing for a change?"

"I can't. It's The Blue Danube. There aren't any words." And he'd waltz around the kitchen, whistling.

"Well, you can do your whistling and waltzing on the verandah," said Granny. "I won't have it in the kitchen. It spoils the food."

When Uncle Ken had a bad tooth removed by the dentist, we thought his whistling would stop. But it only became louder and shriller.

One day, while he was strolling along the road, hands in his pockets, doing nothing, whistling very loudly, a girl on a bicycle passed him. She stopped suddenly, got off the bicycle, and blocked his way.

"If you whistle at me every time I pass, Kenneth Bond," she said, "I'll get my brother to thrash you!"

Uncle Ken went red in the face. "I wasn't whistling at you," he said.

"Well, I don't see anyone else on the road."

"I was whistling God Save the King. Don't you recognize it?"

Uncle Ken on the Job

"We'll have to do something about Uncle Ken," said Granny to the world at large.

I was in the kitchen with her, shelling peas and popping a few into my mouth now and then. Suzie the Siamese cat sat on the sideboard, patiently watching Granny prepare an Irish stew. Suzie liked Irish stew.

"It's not that I mind him staying," said Granny "and I don't want any money from him, either. But it isn't healthy for a young man to remain idle for so long."

"Is Uncle Ken a young man, Gran?"

"He's forty. Every one says he'll improve as he grows up."

"He could go and live with Aunt Mabel."

"He does go and live with Aunt Mabel. He also lives with Aunt Emily and Aunt Beryl. That's his trouble—he has too many doting sisters ready to put him up and put up with him. . . . Their husbands are all quite well off and can afford to have him now and then. So our Ken spends three months with Emily, and three months with me. That way he gets through the year as everyone's guest and doesn't have to worry about making a living."

"He's lucky in a way," I said.

"His luck won't last forever. Already Mabel is talking of going to New Zealand. And once India is free—in just

a year or two from now—Emily and Beryl will probably go to England, because their husbands are in the Army and all British officers will be leaving."

"Can't Uncle Ken follow them to England?"

"He knows he'll have to start working if he goes there. When your aunts find they have to manage without servants, they won't be so ready to keep Uncle Ken for long periods. In any case, who's going to pay his fare to England or New Zealand?"

"If he can't go, he'll stay here with you, Granny. You'll be here, won't you?"

"Not forever. Only while I live."

"You won't go to England?"

"No, I've grown up here. I'm like the trees. I've taken root. I won't be going away—not until, like an old tree, I'm without any more leaves. . . . You'll go, though, when you are bigger. You'll probably finish your schooling in England."

"I'd rather finish it here. I want to spend all my holidays with you. If *I* go to England, who'll look after you when you grow old?"

"I'm old already. Over sixty."

"Is that very old? It's only a little older than Uncle Ken. And how will you look after him when you're *really* old?"

"He can look after himself if he tries. And it's time he started. It's time he took a job."

I pondered on the problem. I could think of nothing that would suit Uncle Ken—or rather, I could think of no one who would find him suitable. It was Ayah who made a suggestion.

"Maharani of Gulshan needing tutor for children," she said. "Just one boy, one girl."

"How do you know?" asked Granny.

"I hear from children ayah. Pay two hundred rupees

for not much work—only two hour every morning."

"That should suit Uncle Ken," I said.

"Yes, it's a good idea," said Granny. "We'll have to tal him into applying. He ought to go over and see them. Th Maharani is a good person to work for."

Uncle Ken agreed to go over and enquire about th job. The Maharani was out when he called, but he wa interviewed by the Maharaja.

"Do you play tennis?" asked the Maharaja.

"Yes," said Uncle Ken, who remembered having playe a bit of tennis when he was a schoolboy.

"In that case, the job's yours. I've been looking for fourth player for a doubles match. . . . By the way were you at Cambridge?"

"No, I was at Oxford," said Uncle Ken.

The Maharaja was impressed. An Oxford man wh could play tennis was just the sort of tutor he wanted fo his children.

When Uncle Ken told Granny about the interview she said, "But you haven't been to Oxford, Ken. How could you say that!"

"Of course I've been to Oxford. Don't you remember I spent two years there with your brother Jim?"

"Yes, but you were helping him in his pub in the town. You weren't at the University."

"Well, the Maharaja never asked me if I'd been to the University. He asked me if I was at Cambridge, and I said no, I was at Oxford, which was perfectly true. He didn' ask me what I was *doing* at Oxford. What difference does it make?" And he strolled off, whistling.

To our surprise, Uncle Ken was a great success in his job. In the beginning, anyway.

The Maharaja was such a poor tennis player that he was delighted to discover that there was someone wh

was even worse. So instead of becoming a doubles partner for the Maharaja, Uncle Ken became his favourite singles opponent. As long as he could keep losing to the Maharaja, Uncle Ken's job was safe.

In between tennis matches and accompanying his employer on duck shoots, Uncle Ken squeezed in a few lessons for the children, teaching them reading, writing and arithmetic. Sometimes he took me along so that I could tell him when he got his sums wrong. Uncle Ken wasn't very good at subtraction.

The Maharaja's children were smaller than I. Uncle Ken would leave me with them, saying, "Just see that they do their sums properly, Rusty," and he would stroll off to the tennis courts, hands in his pockets, whistling tunelessly.

Even if his pupils had different answers to the same sum, he would give both of them an encouraging pat, saying, "Excellent, excellent. I'm glad to see both of you trying so hard. One of you is right, and one of you is wrong, but as I don't want to discourage either of you, I won't say who's right and who's wrong!"

But afterwards, on the way home, he'd ask me, "Which was the right answer, Rusty?"

"They were both wrong, Uncle Ken."

Uncle Ken always maintained that he would never have lost his job if he hadn't beaten the Maharaja at tennis.

Not that Uncle Ken had any intention of winning. But by playing occasional games with the Maharaja's secretaries and guests, his tennis had improved; and so, try as hard as he might to lose, he couldn't help winning a match against his employer.

The Maharaja was furious.

"Mr Bond," he said sternly, "I don't think you realize

the importance of losing. We can't all win, you know. Where would the world be without losers?"

"I'm terribly sorry," said Uncle Ken. "It was just a fluke, your Highness."

The Maharaja accepted Uncle Ken's apologies; about a week later it happened again. Uncle Ken won, and the Maharaja stormed off the court without saying a word.

The following day he turned up at lesson-time. As usual, Uncle Ken and the children were engaged in a game of noughts and crosses.

"We won't be requiring your services from tomorrow, Mr Bond. I've asked my secretary to give you a month's salary in lieu of notice."

Uncle Ken came home with his hands in his pockets, whistling cheerfully.

"You're early," said Granny.

"They don't need me any more," said Uncle Ken.

"Oh well, never mind. Come in and have your tea."

Granny must have known the job wouldn't last very long. And she wasn't one to nag. As she said later, "At least he tried. And it lasted longer than most of his jobs—two months!"

Uncle Ken at the Wheel

On my next visit to Dehra, Mohan met me at the station. We got into a tonga with my luggage and went rattling and jingling along Dehra's quiet roads to Granny's house.

"Tell me all the news, Mohan."

"Not much to tell. Some of the Sahibs selling houses and going away. Suzie had kittens."

Granny knew I'd been in the train for two nights, and she had a huge breakfast ready for me. Porridge. Scrambled eggs on toast. Bacon with fried tomatoes. Toast and marmalade. Sweet milky tea.

She told me there'd been a letter from Uncle Ken.

"He says he's the assistant manager in Firpo's Hotel in Simla," she said. "The salary is very good. And he gets free board and lodging. It's a steady job and I hope he keeps it."

Three days later Uncle Ken was on the verandah steps with his bedding-roll and battered suitcase.

"Have you given up the hotel job?" asked Granny.

"No," said Uncle Ken. "They've closed down."

"I hope it wasn't because of you."

"No, Aunt May. The bigger hotels in the hill stations are all closing down."

"Well, never mind. Come along and have your tiffin.

There's kofta curry today. It's Rusty's favourite."

"Oh, is he here too? I've far too many nephews and nieces. Still, he's preferable to those two girls of Mabel's. They made life miserable for me all the time I was with them in Simla."

Over tiffin (as lunch was called in those days), Uncle Ken talked very seriously about ways and means of earning a living.

"There's only one taxi in the whole of Dehra," he mused. "Surely there's business for another?"

"I'm sure there is," said Granny. "But where does it get you? In the first place, you don't have a taxi. And in the second place, you can't drive."

"I can soon learn. There's a driving-school in town. And I can use Uncle's old car. It's been gathering dust in the garage for years." (He was referring to Grandfather's vintage Hillman Roadster. It was a 1925 model, which made it twenty years old.)

"I don't think it will run now," said Granny.

"Of course it will. It just needs some oiling and greasing, and a spot of paint."

"All right learn to drive. Then we'll see about the Roadster."

So Uncle Ken joined the driving-school.

He was very regular, going for his lessons for an hour every evening. Granny paid the fees.

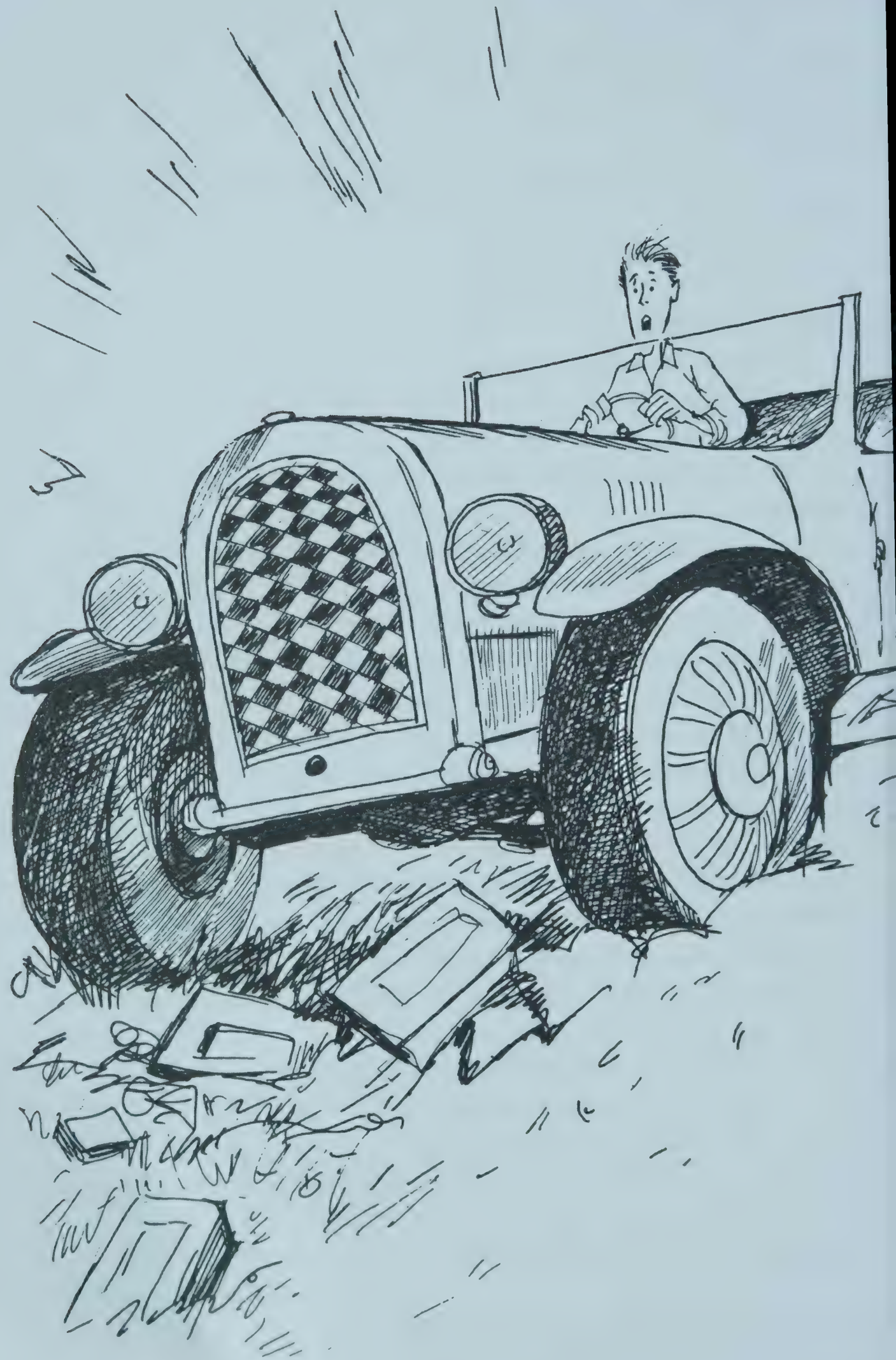
After a month, Uncle Ken announced that he could drive and that he was taking the Roadster out for a trial run.

"You haven't got your licence yet," said Granny.

"Oh, I won't take her far," said Uncle Ken. "Just down the road and back again."

He spent all morning cleaning up the car. Granny gave him the money for a can of petrol.

After tea, Uncle Ken said, "Come along, Rusty, hop in



and I'll give you a ride. Bring Mohan along too."

Mohan and I didn't want to take any chances. "Next time, Uncle Ken," I said.

"Now, don't go too fast, Ken," said Granny anxiously. "You're not used to the car as yet."

Uncle Ken nodded and smiled and gave two sharp toots on the horn. He was feeling pleased with himself.

Miss Kellner, coming out for her evening walk, saw Uncle Ken at the wheel of the Roadster and went indoors again.

Uncle Ken drove straight and fast, tootling the horn without a break.

At the end of the road there was a roundabout.

"I'll turn here," thought Uncle Ken," and then drive back again."

He turned the steering-wheel; he began going round the roundabout; but the steering-wheel wouldn't turn all the way, not, as much as Uncle Ken would have liked it to. . . . So, instead of going round, he took a right turn and kept going straight on—and straight through the Maharaja of Gulshan's garden wall.

It was a single brick wall, and the Roadster knocked it down and emerged on the other side without any damage to the car or its occupant. Uncle Ken brought it to a halt in the middle of the Maharaja's lawn.

Running across the lawn was the Maharaja himself, flanked by his secretaries and their assistants.

When he saw that it was Uncle Ken at the wheel, the Maharaja beamed with pleasure.

"Delighted to see you old chap!" he exclaimed. "Jolly decent of you to drop in. How about a game of tennis?"

Uncle Ken at the Wicket

Although restored to the Maharaja's favour, Uncle Ken was still without a job.

Granny refused to let him take the Hillman out again, and so he decided to sulk. He said it was all Grandfather's fault for not seeing to the steering-wheel ten years ago while he was still alive. Uncle Ken went on a hunger-strike for two hours (between tiffin and tea), and we didn't hear him whistle for several days.

"The blessedness of silence," said Granny.

And then he announced that he was going to Lucknow to stay with Aunt Emily.

"She has three children and a school to look after," said Granny. "Don't stay too long."

"*She* doesn't mind how long I stay," said Uncle Ken grumpily, and off he went.

His visit to Lucknow was a memorable one, and we only heard about it much later.

When Uncle Ken got down at Lucknow station, he found himself surrounded by a large crowd, everyone waving to him and shouting words of welcome in Hindi, Urdu and English. Before he could make out what it was all about, he was smothered by garlands of marigolds. A young man came forward and announced: "The Gomti Cricketing Association welcomes you to the historical

city of Lucknow," and promptly led Uncle Ken out of the station to a car that was waiting outside for them.

It was only when the car drove into the sports stadium that Uncle Ken realized that he was expected to play in a cricket match.

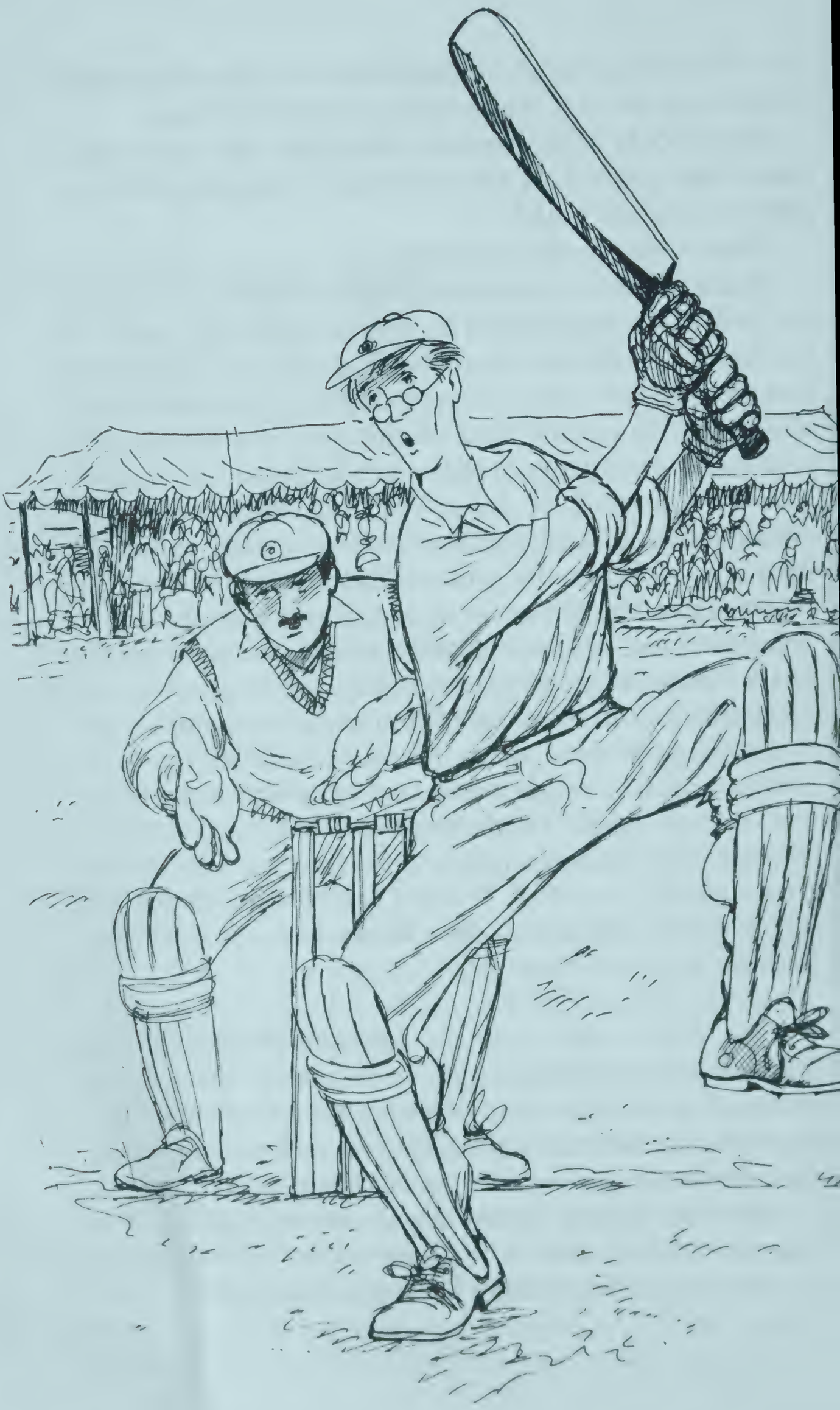
This is what had happened:

Bruce Hallam, the famous English cricketer, was touring India and had agreed to play in a charity match at Lucknow. But the previous evening in Delhi, Mr Hallam had gone to bed with an upset stomach and hadn't been able to get up in time to catch the train. A telegram was sent to the organizers of the match in Lucknow; but like many a telegram, it didn't reach its destination. The cricket fans of Lucknow had arrived at the station in droves to welcome the great cricketer. And by a strange coincidence, Uncle Ken bore a startling resemblance to Bruce Hallam, even to the bald patch on the crown of his head. Hence the muddle. And of course Uncle Ken was always happy to enter into the spirit of a muddle.

Having received from the Gomti Cricketing Association a rousing reception and a magnificent breakfast at the stadium, he felt that it would be very unsporting on his part if he refused to play cricket for them. "If I can hit a tennis ball," he mused, "I ought to be able to hit a cricket ball." And luckily there was a blazer and a pair of white flannels in his suitcase.

The Gomti team won the toss and decided to bat. Uncle Ken was expected to go in at number three, Bruce Hallam's normal position. He soon found himself walking to the wicket, wondering why on earth no one had as yet invented a more comfortable pair of pads.

The first ball he received was short-pitched, and he was able to deal with it in tennis fashion, swatting it to the mid-wicket boundary. The crowd cheered.



The next ball took Uncle Ken on the pad. He was right in front of his wicket and should have been given out leg-before. But the umpire hesitated to raise his finger. After all, hundreds of people had paid good money to see Bruce Hallam play and it would have been a shame to disappoint them.

"Not out," said the umpire.

The third ball took the edge of Uncle Ken's bat and sped through the slips.

"Lovely shot!" exclaimed an elderly gentleman in the pavilion.

"A classic late-cut," said another.

The ball reached the boundary and Uncle Ken had four runs to his name. Then it was 'over', and the other batsman had to face the bowling. He took a run off the first ball and called for a second run. Uncle Ken thought one run was more than enough. Why go charging up and down the wicket like a madman? However, he couldn't refuse to run, and he was half-way down the pitch when the fielder's throw hit the wicket. Uncle Ken was run out by yards. There could be no doubt about it this time.

He returned to the pavilion to the sympathetic applause of the crowd.

"Not his fault," said the elderly gentleman. "The other chap shouldn't have called. There wasn't a run there. Still, it was worth coming here all the way from Kanpur if only to see that superb late-cut!"

Uncle Ken enjoyed a hearty tiffin (taken at noon), and then, realizing that the Gomti team would probably have to be in the field for most of the afternoon—more running about!—he slipped out of the pavilion, left the stadium, and took a tonga to Aunt Emily's house in the cantonment.

He was just in time for a second lunch (taken at

one o'clock), with Aunt Emily's family; and it was presumed at the stadium that Bruce Hallam had left early to catch the train to Allahabad, where he was expected to play in another charity match.

Aunt Emily, a forceful woman, fed Uncle Ken for a week, and then put him to work in the small boys dormitory of her school. It was several months before he was able to save up enough money to run away and return to Granny's place.

But he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had helped the great Bruce Hallam to add four runs to his grand total. The score-book of the Gomti Cricketing Association has recorded this feat for all time:

B. Hallam	run out	4

The Gomti team lost that match. But, as Uncle Ken would readily admit—where would we be without losers?

Running Away

Grand Plans for Mombasa

As the big clock on top of the school pavilion struck eleven, I crept out of bed, slipped on my gym shoes, and moved silently across the dormitory.

I stopped in the doorway and peered back into the dark room to make sure that no one else was awake; then I hurried along the corridor and down the stairs. Daljit was already on the verandah. He was a Sikh. He had removed his turban for the night and his long hair was bunched up on his head in a big knot. The white pyjama suit he was wearing stood out like a beacon in the darkness. If any teachers were about, we would certainly be seen.

He put a finger to his lips as soon as he saw me. This was quite unnecessary, since I was the cautious one; but Daljit was enjoying himself, and wanted to make everything mysterious.

Tiptoeing was not in Daljit's line; he had big feet, and was often teased about them. There is a saying in the Punjab that if you have big feet you will be good only for manual work. Daljit denied this. He said that if you had big feet you would travel a lot, and he was now out to prove his theory.

We ran silently across the flat in front of the pavilion, while heavy monsoon clouds scurried overhead. Run-

ning down the pavilion steps, we entered the gymnasium. The gym door was usually left open, and it was in this huge damp room, smelling of coir matting, varnish and perspiration, that we held our nightly meetings.

This was to be our final meeting before running away from school.

"Have you got everything ready?" asked Daljit, lighting the stub of a candle and placing it on the floor between us.

We sat cross-legged, facing each other. The candle cast a glow on Daljit's round, good-natured face. It left me in the shadows.

"Yes, everything's ready, "I said. "A knife, two packets of biscuits, some bread, a tin of sardines, and some sweets."

The bread, which had been pocketed during the previous week's meals, was now quite stale and hard, but I wanted to make my list as long as possible.

"Not much," said Daljit. "And how much money do you have?"

"Six rupees. That's two months' pocket-money."

"Not bad, Rusty." He knew I did not get much pocket-money. "Well, I've got about thirty rupees, so we don't have to worry too much about money—not yet, anyway. And I've got some cheese, jam, chocolate and pickle all saved from my last parcel."

"Pickle with chocolate?"

"No, of course not. But it will go with stuff we'll get to eat on the way."

Daljit frequently received food parcels from his father, who was a businessman in East Africa. Part of Daljit's plan was to get back to Africa, because he was fed up with living in a boarding-school in India. This was where we joined forces. My uncle was the captain of a small tramp-steamer which sometimes plied between

Mombasa in East Africa, and either Jamnagar or Dwaraka, two small ports on the west coast of India. His ship, the *S.S. Lucy*, was due to call at Jamnagar at the end of the month, and we hoped to persuade him to take us on board.

Daljit wanted to get back to Africa. He said that when his father realized that he could get back on his own, he wouldn't dare send him to school in India again.

I wanted to get away, too, but for different reasons. True, school was one of them. Though not as grim as Dickens' Dotheboy's Hall, it was not a good school. The Principal ran the place more as a business enterprise than as a school. "Give a little, take a lot," was his motto. He charged high fees, and in return gave us bad food and bad teachers. At any rate, that's what we boys thought.

Daljit, of course, had only himself to blame for being in Arundel (yes, that was our school's name). He had refused to settle down in any of the other schools he had been sent to, and had, by a process of elimination, come to Arundel, where, after only three months of a diet consisting mostly of lentil soup and mutton fat, he was eager to get away.

"I'll have no more schools after this one," he declared. "I'll go straight into my father's business in Nairobi. I can read and write, and I know the difference between a profit and a loss. That's all I need. What about you, Rusty?"

"I want to be a writer," I said. "I don't mind going to school, but I don't like this one, and I know my guardian won't send me to any other."

My parents were dead, and my guardian had sent me to Arundel because the Principal was a friend of his, and he had only to pay half-fees for me. Before coming to Arundel, I had attended a day-school in the plains; but, as I grew older, my guardian found it very irksome to

look after me. I was inclined to be rebellious, to spend my time in the bazaars instead of at home, and to read books instead of taking an interest in manly pastimes like his, which consisted of shooting wild animals. I had never cared much for my guardian (a cousin of my mother's) and he had been disappointed in me.

But the main reason for running away was not to get back to the bazaars or my guardian's house, but to reach my uncle's ship in Jamnagar.

Uncle Jim was my father's younger brother. He had last seen me when I was a small boy of five; I was now twelve. Uncle Jim had written to me off and on throughout the years, and his letters had been gay with the colourful stamps of different countries. They came from Valparaiso, San Diego, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, Dar-es-Salaam, Mombasa, Freetown, Singapore, Bombay, Marseilles, London. . . . these were some of the places where Uncle Jim's ship called. He was seldom on the same route, and seemed to move leisurely across the oceans of the earth calling at ports which had only the most romantic associations for me, for I had already read Stevenson, Captain Marryat, some Conrad and W.W. Jacobs.

In his letters, Uncle Jim often spoke of my joining him at sea—"When you are a little older, Rusty."

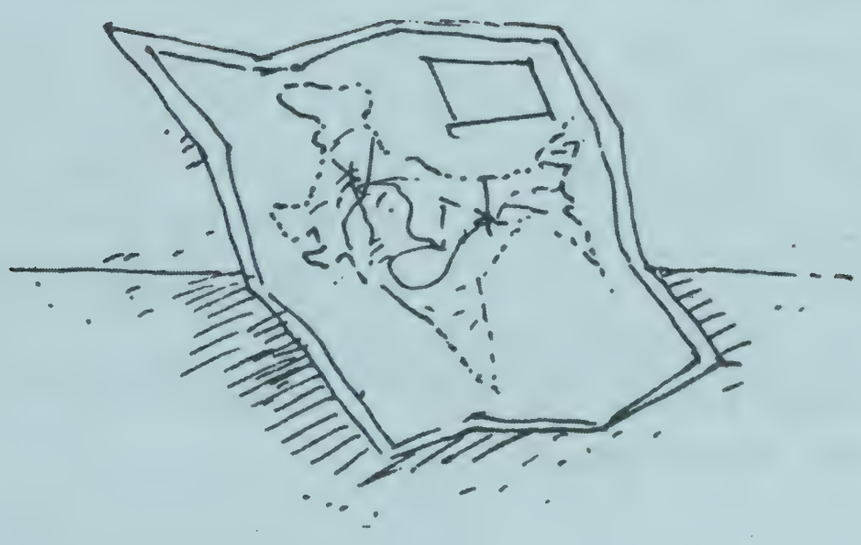
I felt I was old enough now. I was sick of school and sick of my guardian. But that was not all. I was in love with the world. I wanted to see the world, every corner of it, the places I had read about in books—the junks and sampans of Hong Kong, the palm-fringed lagoons of the Indies, the streets of London, the beautiful ebony-skinned people of Africa, the bright birds and exotic plants of the Amazon. . . .

When Uncle Jim's last letter had arrived, telling me that his ship would call at Jamnagar towards the end of

the month, I felt a deep thrill of anticipation. Here was my chance at last! True, Uncle Jim had said nothing about my joining him, but he was not to know that I was seriously considering it.

It was not simply a question of walking out of school and taking a quick ride down to the docks. Jamnagar, on the west coast, was at least eight hundred miles from Paharganj, the hill station in northern India where we went to school.

Eight hundred miles!



A Meeting by Moonlight

I doubt if I would have made the attempt if Daljit had not agreed to come too. It isn't much fun running away on your own. It is even worse if you have a companion who is full of enthusiasm at the beginning and who backs out at the last moment. This leaves one feeling defeated and crushed.

Daljit was not that kind of companion. He meant the things he said. About a month earlier, when I had told him of my uncle's ship and my wish to get to it, he had said, without a moment's hesitation, "I'm coming too!"

Daljit lived impulsively. Sometimes he made mistakes. But he never went half-way and stopped. Someone had to stop him, otherwise he did whatever it was he set out to do.

We had become friends during the early monsoon marathon runs. I was much better at short races, and Daljit was a little too chubby to keep up with the other boys. Allowing the good athletes to forge ahead, I would sit down on a grassy knoll and read a comic or a chapter from David Copperfield. One evening, while I was making use of the run in this way, I saw Daljit strolling down the road, whistling cheerfully.

"Aren't you in the race?" I asked.

"Yes. Aren't you?"

"Yes," I said, and returned to my book.

Daljit sat down beside me.

"They won't miss us if we're a little late," he said. "Why don't we go over to that stall and eat some hot pakoras? Don't worry about money. I have more than enough. I can't stop my mother from spoiling me."

It was the beginning of a steady friendship. Based at first on pakoras, and a mutual aversion to long-distance races, it soon developed a stronger foundation. After several marathons together, we felt we had known each other for years.

Now, sitting together in the dark, high-ceilinged gymnasium, we felt we understood each other perfectly. I did not mind the fact that Daljit had more money. He did not mind the fact that I was more 'brainy', as he put it. He was impressed by the extent of my reading. But I was an impractical fellow, and in the ways of the world Daljit was more experienced.

He pulled a folder from his pyjama-waist, and opened it out on the floor. It was a Railway Map of India. We had purchased it during our last and final marathon run, a memorable occasion when we had cut off to the bazaar, and then having made several purchases, used a short cut back to school, arriving first and second respectively in the race. (We were, of course, disqualified, when the judges came back and insisted that they had not seen us anywhere along the prescribed route: but we had our few moments of glory, with everyone congratulating us on our victory.)

With the map spread out before us, I took a red pencil and circled Paharganj in the Himalayan foothills. Then I circled Jamnagar, at the tip of the Kathiawar Peninsula, facing the Gulf of Kutch. What lay between? First, hills and forests; then the flat, fertile plains of the Doab (the Jamuna-Ganga basin) stretching to a little beyond Delhi;

then the bare brown hills and sand dunes of the Rajasthan desert; and finally the fertile coastal regions of Gujarat and Maharashtra. There were rivers and lakes. We would make what use we could of all available means of transport, as we did not have much time to lose. Uncle Jim's ship would not stay in port any longer than was necessary; it would sail again at the end of July, before the monsoon became too troublesome.

"We must get to Delhi as soon as possible," I said. "Otherwise we'll be caught easily. Once Delhi has been left behind, then they won't know where to look. India's too big. It's easy to get lost."

"Do you think they'd bother to look for us?"

"Yes, of course. Remember, my guardian is a friend of the Principal. And your father will sue the school if anything happens to you! As soon as they find us missing, they'll start searching in Paharganj, and if they don't find us here or in Dehra, they'll inform the police, and we'll be on the Wanted list, like criminals. The railway stations and bus stands will be watched."

"Does that mean we're going to walk to Delhi?" said Daljit looking dismayed. "I can't walk one hundred and twenty-five miles."

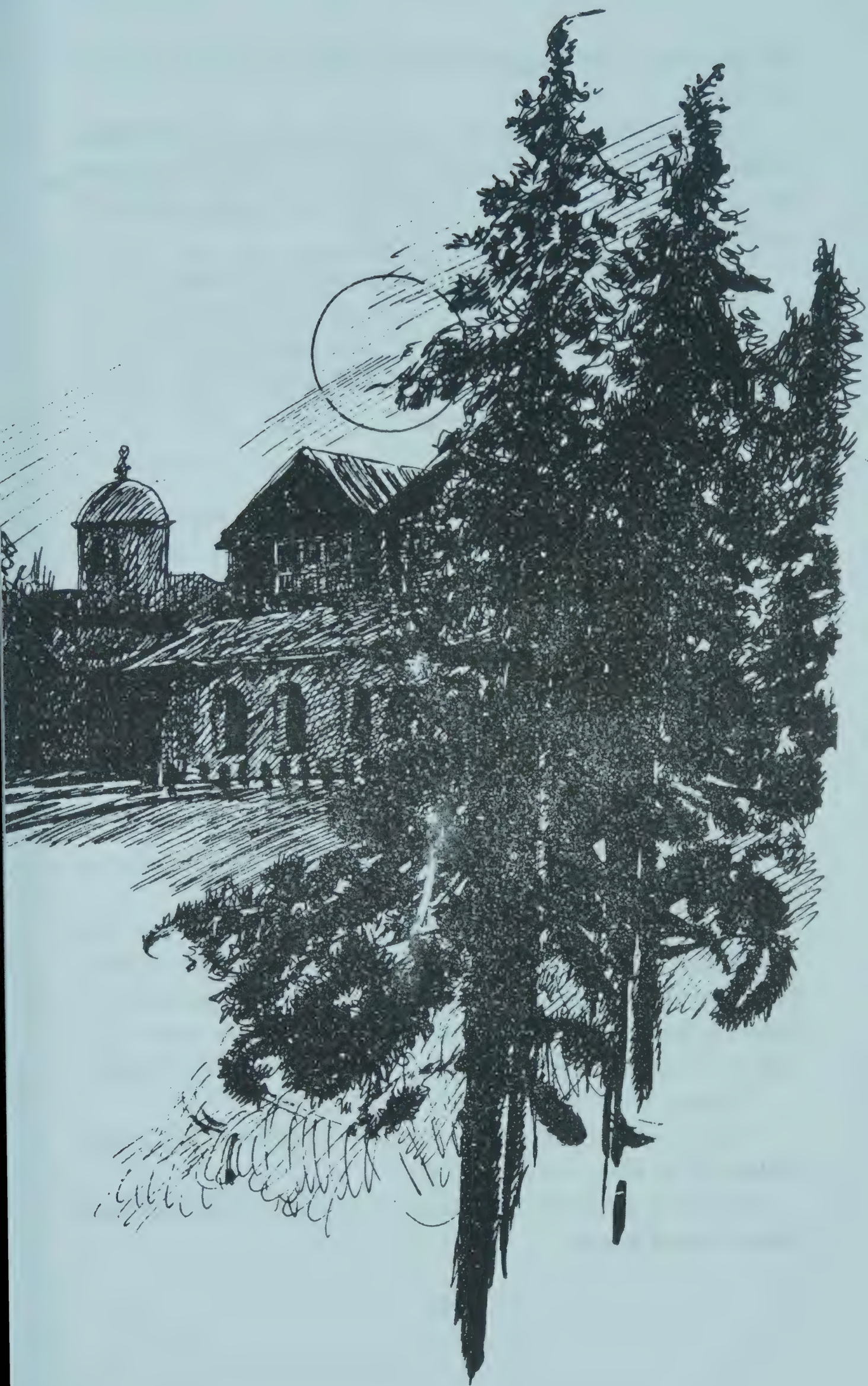
"We'll walk only as far as Dehra. That's twelve miles, downhill. Can you manage that?"

"I suppose so, if it's all downhill."

"From Dehra we'll have to get a train or a bus or a truck. We'll have to avoid the railway stations."

"All right, Rusty. That's fine. Let's not plan too far ahead. Let's get to Delhi first. It's far enough. After that, we'll take our chances."

We were silent, busy with our own thoughts, thinking of the consequences if we were caught, of the dangers and difficulties we might encounter. The candle spluttered and went out. There was total darkness for a



minute, then a thin light darted across the floor and over my feet.

"Do you like my pencil torch?" asked Daljit. "Made in Japan, and designed by James Bond. I bought it in Nairobi last year. But we mustn't waste the battery; this size isn't available here." He switched it off.

"You must have been terribly spoilt at home," I said.

"I was," said Daljit with a chuckle. "I'm thoroughly spoilt!" He gave me his hand. "It's tomorrow night, then?" he whispered. There was no need to whisper, but Daljit enjoyed making things dramatic.

"Yes, tomorrow night," I said.

"Where do we meet?"

"Down in the pine forest. Near the big rock. At ten. From there we'll follow the stream until we meet the bridle-path to Dehra."

"Be on time," said Daljit. "I don't want to be waiting for you in the dark, in the middle of the forest. They say it's haunted."

"Well, you have your torch," I said.

He gripped my hand again. "We won't talk to each other in school tomorrow. No one must have any suspicions. Now let's go to bed, I'm sleepy."

"Sleep well," I said. "There won't be much sleep for us from tomorrow."

As we emerged from the gymnasium, we saw that the moon had risen. The flat, the pavilion and the dormitory building stood out clearly in the moonlight. The deodars threw ghostly shadows on the hillside. There were only a few clouds drifting overhead. It was a beautiful night.

"I hope we won't be seen," said Daljit.

"If you're caught, say you saw me sleep-walking, and followed to keep an eye on me."

"That's a good idea. I suppose you get your brilliant ideas out of books."

We flitted across the flat like a couple of ghouls, and ran swiftly upstairs to our dormitories.

At the entrance to his dormitory, Daljit turned and gave me a conspiratorial wave. I crept into my bed and tried to sleep. But sleep was elusive. I kept thinking of our coming adventure, imagining the kind of journey we would have, and visualizing my uncle's surprise when we turned up on his ship. I would work for my passage, of course. Daljit and I could be deck-hands.

Yokohama, Valparaiso, San Diego, London!

Tea at the Dhaba

Running away from school! It is not to be recommended to everyone. Parents and teachers would disapprove. Or would they, deep down in their hearts? Everyone has wanted to run away, at some time in his life if not from a bad school or an unhappy home, then from something equally unpleasant. Running away seems to be in the best traditions. Huck Finn did it. So did Master Copperfield and Oliver Twist. So did Kim. Various enterprising young men have run away to sea. Most great men have run away from school at some stage in their lives; and if they haven't, then perhaps it is something they should have done.

Anyway, Daljit and I ran away from school, and we won't waste any more time with excuses. We did it quite successfully too, up to a point. But then, all this happened in India, and India, though it forms only two per cent of the world's land mass, has fifteen per cent of its population, and so it is an easy place to hide in, or be lost in, or disappear in, and never be seen or heard of again!

Not that we intended disappearing. We were headed for a particular place—Jamnagar—and as soon as I took my first step into the unknown, that first step on the slippery pine needles below the school, I knew quite definitely that I wasn't running away from anything, but that I was running towards something. Call it a dream, if

you like. I was running towards a dream.

In bare feet and pyjamas, I slid down the steep slope of the hill, and was the first to reach the flat rock in the middle of the forest. There was a soft breeze sighing in the pine trees. The night was pleasant and cool. From the ravine below came the subdued murmur of the stream; it made a sound like a man humming rather tunelessly to himself. The full moon came out from behind massed monsoon clouds, and the trees, bushes and boulders emerged from the darkness.

Daljit arrived a few minutes later. Though still in his pyjamas, he was wearing his turban. Daljit's turban was a source of great pride to him as turbans are to most Sikhs. He removed it only at night, or for games, and he would never have dreamt of running away bareheaded. When going to bed he had taken it off without unwinding it, and on leaving bed he put it on again like a hat, very neatly, without spoiling a single fold.

We had brought our gym clothes along in bundles and changed into them before going any further as our school clothes would be too conspicuous and our home clothes were packed away in the box room during the term. We had put on our gym shoes. Our haversacks were filled with our provisions; pyjamas, and a couple of books, went in with them. The bulk of our possessions—our clothes, bedding and boxes we had gaily left behind.

A narrow path ran downhill, and we followed it until it levelled out, running parallel with the small stream that rumbled down the mountainside. We followed the stream for a mile, walking swiftly and silently, until we met the bridle-path which was little more than a mule-track going steeply down the last hills to the valley.

The going was easy. We knew the road well. And by the time we reached the last foothills it was beginning to rain, not heavily, but as a light, thin, drizzle.

We took shelter in a small dhaba on the outskirts of a village. The dhabawallah was still sleeping, and his dog a mangy pariah with only one ear, sniffed at us in a friendly way instead of chasing us off the premises. We sat down on an old bench and watched the sun rising over the distant mountains.

This was something I have always remembered not because it was a more beautiful sunrise than on any other day, but because the special importance of that morning made me look at everything in a new way, and the details stand out clearly in my memory.

As the sky grew lighter, the tall pines and deodars stood out clearly, and the birds came to life. A blackbird

started it all with a low, mellow call, and then the thrushes began chattering in the bushes. A barbet shrieked monotonously at the top of a spruce tree, and, as the sky grew lighter still, a flock of bright green parrots flew low over the trees.

The rain was very light, almost a drizzle, and there was a bright crimson glow in the east. And then, quite suddenly, the sun shot through a gap in the clouds, and the lush green monsoon grass sprang into relief. Both Daljit and I were wonderstruck. We had never been up so early before. Hundreds of spiders' webs, spun in trees and bushes and on the grass, where they would not normally have been noticed, were now clearly visible, spangled with gold and silver raindrops. The strong silk held the light rain, and the sun took each drop of water and made of it a tiny jewel.

A great wild dahlia, its scarlet flowers drenched and heavy, sprawled over the hillside and an emerald-green grasshopper reclined on a petal, stretching its legs in the sunshine.

The dhabawallah was now up. His dog, emboldened by his master's presence, began to bark at us. The man lit a charcoal fire in a *choolah,* and put a kettle of water on to boil.

"Will you eat anything?" he asked conversationally in Hindi.

"No, just tea for us," I said.

He placed two brass tumblers on a table.

"The milk hasn't arrived," he said. "You're very early."

"We'll take the tea without milk," said Daljit, "but give us lots of sugar."

"Sugar is costly these days. But since you are school-boys, and need more, you can help yourselves."

"Oh, we are not school boys," I said hurriedly.

"Not at all," said Daljit.

"We are just tourists," I added.

"We have to catch the early train at Dehra," offered Daljit.

"There's no train before ten o'clock," said the puzzled dhabawallah.

"It is the ten o'clock train we are catching," said Daljit smartly. "Do you think we will be down in time?"

"Oh yes, there's plenty of time. . . ."

The dhabawallah poured hot tea into the tumblers and placed the sugar bowl in front of us.

"At first I thought you were schoolboys," he said with a laugh. "I thought you were running away."

Daljit laughed a little nervously, I thought.

"What made you think that?" he asked.

"Oh, I've been here many years," he said, gesturing towards the small clearing in which his little wooden stall stood, almost like a trading outpost in a wild country.

"Schoolboys always pass this way when they're running away!"

"Do many run away?" I asked.

"Not many. Just two or three every year. They get as far as the railway station in Dehra and there they're caught!"

"It is silly of them to get caught," said Daljit.

"Are they always caught?" I asked.

"Always! I give them a glass of tea on their way down, and I give them a glass of tea on their way up, when they are returning with their teachers."

"Well, you will not see us again," said Daljit, ignoring the warning look that I gave him.

"Ah, but you aren't school boys!" said the shopkeeper, beaming at us. "And you aren't running away!"

We paid for our tea and hurried on down the path. The parrots flew over again, screeching loudly, and settled in a lichee tree. The sun was warmer now, and as the

altitude decreased, the temperature and humidity rose, and we could almost smell the heat of the plains rising to meet us.

The hills levelled out into rolling country, patterned with fields. Rice had been planted out, and the sugar-cane was waist-high.

The path had become quite slushy. Removing our shoes and wrapping them in newspaper, we walked barefoot in the soft mud.

"It's about three miles into Dehra," I said. "We must go round the town. By now, everyone in school will be up and they'll have found out we've gone!"

"We must avoid the station," said Daljit.

"We'll walk to the next station, Raiwala," I said. "Then we'll hop onto the first train that comes along."

"How far must we walk?"

"About ten miles."

"Ten miles!" Daljit looked dismayed. "It'll take us all day!"

"Well, we can't stop here, we can't wander about in Dehra, and we can't enter the station. We have to keep on walking."

"All right, Rusty. We'll keep on walking. I suppose the beginning of an adventure is always the most difficult part."

Of Tigers and Bullock-Carts

Already the fields were giving way to jungle. But there were still some fields of sugarcane stretching away from the railway lines.

"How much further do we have to walk?" asked Daljit. "Is Raiwala in the middle of the jungle?"

"Yes, I think it is. We've covered about four miles, I suppose. Six to go! It's funny how some miles seem longer than others. It depends on what one is thinking about, I suppose. If our thoughts are pleasant, the miles are not so long."

"Then let's keep thinking pleasant thoughts. Isn't there a short cut anywhere, Rusty? You've been in these forests before."

"We'll take the firepath through the jungle. It'll save us three or four miles. But we'll have to swim or wade across a small river. The rains have only just started, so the water shouldn't be too swift or deep."

Heavy forests have paths cut through them at various places to prevent forest fires from spreading easily. These paths are not used much by people since they don't lead anywhere in particular, but they are frequently used by the larger animals.

We had gone about a mile along the path when we heard the sound of rushing water. The path emerged

from the forest of sal trees and stopped on the banks of a small river. The main bridge across the river stood on the main road, about three miles downstream.

"It isn't more than waist-deep anywhere," I said. "But the water is swift and the stones are slippery."

We removed our clothes and tied everything into two bundles which we carried on our heads. Daljit was a well-built boy, strong in the arms and thighs. I was slimmer and lighter, but I had quick reflexes.

The stones were slippery underfoot, and we stumbled, hindering rather than helping each other. We stopped in midstream, waist-deep, hesitating about going any further for fear of being swept off our feet.

"I can hardly stand," said Daljit.

"It won't get worse," I said hopefully. But the current was strong, and I felt very wobbly at the knees.

Daljit tried to move forward, slipped, and went over backwards into the water, bringing me down too. He began kicking and thrashing about, but eventually, by using me as a support, came up spouting water like a whale.

When we found we were not being swept away, we stopped struggling and cautiously made our way to the opposite bank, but we had been thrust about twenty yards downstream.

We rested on warm sand, while a hot sun beat down on us. Daljit sucked at a cut in his hand. But we were soon up and walking again, hungry now, and munching biscuits.

"We haven't far to go," I said.

"I don't want to think about it," said Daljit.

We shuffled along the forest path, tired but not discouraged. Then we rounded a bend.

And found ourselves face to face with a tiger!

Well, not quite face to face. The tiger was about fifteen

yards away, right in the middle of the path. He was probably just as surprised to see us as we were to see him. He raised his great head, and his long tail swished from side to side, but he made no move towards us. We stood absolutely still in the middle of the path. We were too frightened and astonished to do anything else, which was just as well, because had we run or shouted, the tiger might have taken alarm and attacked us. But this tiger was not afraid of humans; nor was he a man-eater. He gave a low growl, and after a moment's hesitation, padded off into the jungle.

When we found our voices, Daljit said in a hoarse whisper, "You didn't tell me there were tigers here."

"I didn't think about it," I said, which was true. "There aren't many. . . ."

"One is enough," said Daljit. "Do we go backward or forward?"

"Forward, unless you want to struggle across the river again. The tiger is not interested in us."

"Forward, then," said Daljit, and we continued down the firepath without seeing any more animals, only some splendid peacocks which went flapping away at our approach.

Soon we were on the main road again, and there were fields and villages on either side. A cool breeze came across the open plain, blowing down from the hills. In the fields there was a gentle swaying movement as the wind stirred the cane. Then the breeze came down the road, and dust began to swirl and eddy around us. Out of the dust, behind us, came the rumble of cart-wheels.

"Ho! Heeyah! Heeyah!" shouted the driver of the cart. The bullocks snorted and came lumbering through the dust. We moved to the side of the road.

"Are you going to Raiwala?" called Daljit. "Can you take us with you?"

"Climb up!" said the man, and we ran through the dust and clambered onto the back of the moving cart.

The cart lurched and rattled and bumped and we had to cling to its sides to avoid falling off. It smelt of grass and mint and cow-dung cakes. The driver had a red cloth tied round his head, and wore a tight vest and a dhoti. He was smoking a bidi, and shouting to his bullocks, and he seemed to have forgotten our presence. We were too busy clinging to the sides of the cart to bother about making conversation. Before long we were involved in the traffic of Raiwala, a small but busy market town. We jumped off the bullock-cart and walked beside it.

"Should we offer him any money?" I asked.

"No. He will be offended. He is not a taxi driver."

"All right, we'll just say thank you."

We called out our thanks to the cart driver, but he didn't look back. He appeared to be talking to his bullocks.

"I'm hungry," said Daljit. "We haven't had a proper meal since last night."

"Then let's eat," I said. "Come on, Daljit."

We walked through the small Raiwala bazaar, looking in at the tea and sweet shops until we found the cheapest looking dhaba. A servant-boy brought us rice and dal and Daljit ordered an ounce of ghee which he poured over the curry. The meal cost us two rupees but we could have as much dal as we wanted, and between us we finished four bowls of it.

"We'll rest at the station," I said, as we emerged from the dhaba. "We'll buy second class tickets, and rest in the first class waiting room. No one will check on us. We look first class, don't we?"

"Not after that walk through the jungle," said Daljit.

But we occupied the best waiting-room and Daljit made himself comfortable in an armchair.

"Wake me when the train comes in," he said drowsily.

We didn't have long to wait. I was leaning against the door, staring across the railway tracks, when I heard the whistle of an approaching train. It came in slowly, the big hissing engine sending out waves of steam. A crowd was waiting on the platform, and it surged forward as the train drew up. At the same time the carriage doors opened and passengers started pouring out.

I had to shake Daljit to wake him up, and we emerged onto the platform to join the fray. Men, women and children pushed and struggled, and for some time nobody could get either in or out of the carriages. Bundles of belongings were passed through windows over the heads of people. Several young men climbed in at the windows, heads first, assisted by pushes from behind. Daljit and I, clinging to our bundles, were caught up in the general rush and confusion, and were conveniently swept into a compartment.

By the time we had settled down in a corner seat, the train was moving. One or two people still hung onto doors and windows, worming their way in as opportunity offered.

I was near a window, and as the train gathered speed, and mango groves and villages mingled with telegraph posts as we rushed past, I realized that we were now really on our way, moving into the mysterious unknown. In my excitement I gripped Daljit by the arm.

"We are on our way!" I said.

"That's obvious," said Daljit, who was trying to extract his haversack from under a fat fellow passenger who had fallen asleep on it in the midst of all the confusion.

But Daljit knew what I meant, and after retrieving the haversack, he gave me a grin and his eyes were alive with excitement.

A Narrow Escape

At Old Delhi Station we got down from the train like perfectly respectable people and moved confidently towards the exit, quite pleased at the prospect of handing over our tickets to the ticketcollector. The crowd was dense and movement slow. And this was a good thing, because when we were only about thirty feet from the exit, I spotted Mr Jain, our maths teacher, talking to the ticketcollector.

Mr Jain was the most efficient teacher we had at Arundel and he had obviously been sent after us. He was tubby and wore glasses, but he was a shrewd man and knew just where to intercept us. We had to get away from the exit.

"Let's get away from here," I whispered fiercely, grabbing at Daljit.

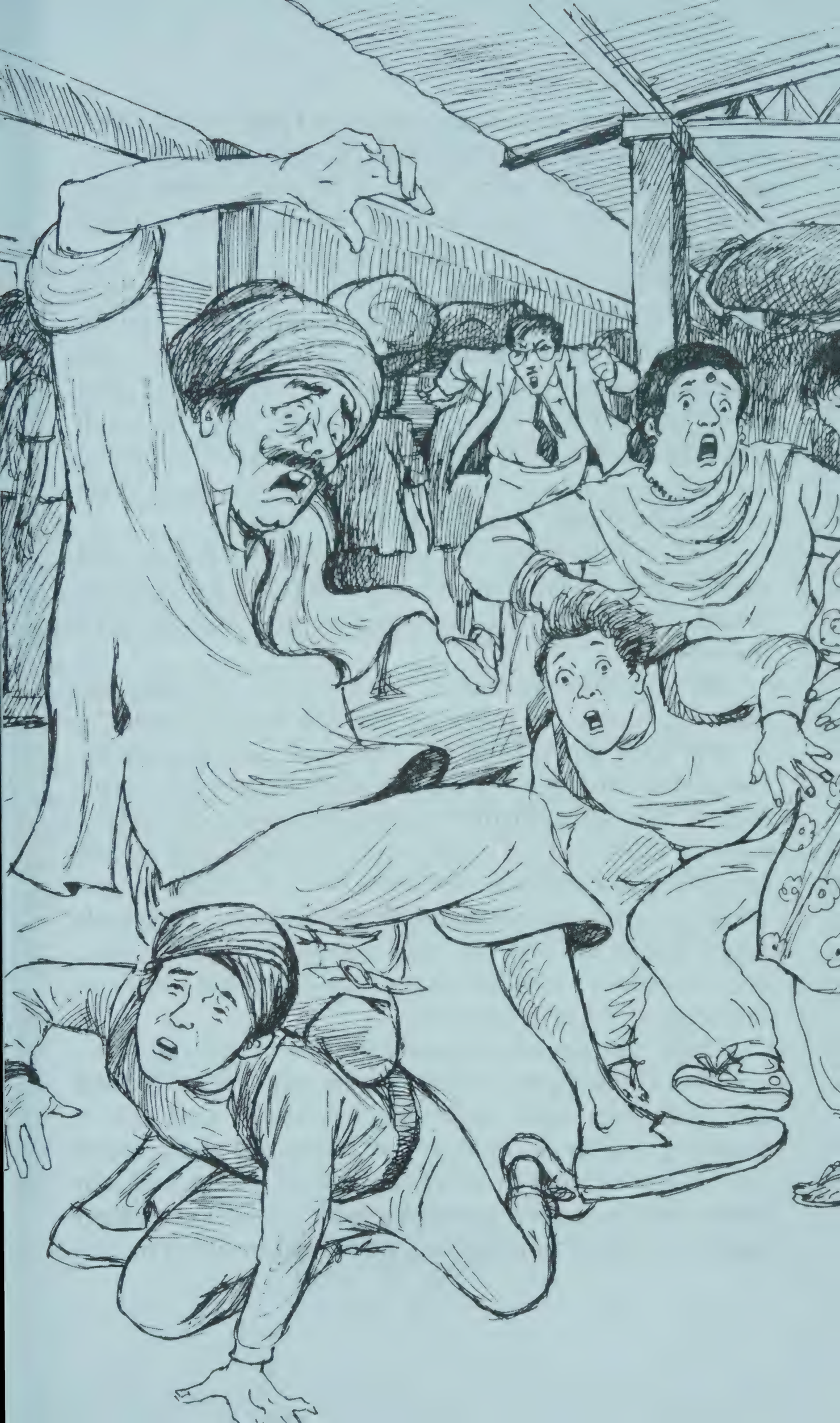
"Why?" asked Daljit, who had not seen Mr Jain.

"Can't you see?" I said. "With the ticketcollector!"

Daljit almost tripped himself up in his hurry to vanish. The crowd was pushing towards the exit, and we were up against a human wall which would not give way at any point. Just then Mr Jain spotted us, and we heard him shout.

"Boys, come here! Rusty! Daljit!"

For a brief moment, I was on the verge of obeying the



familiar voice of my teacher; and then I had a swift vision of classrooms and dormitories and the Principal's gloomy, rat-whiskered face, and I hated it all and wanted to get away as fast as I could; I wanted to keep running until I reached the sea and my uncle's ship.

Daljit did not hesitate for a moment. He plunged beneath the legs of a tall Jat farmer, and almost lost his turban as he went through. I headed for a narrow gap between two stout Punjabi women, but they closed their ranks before I was completely through, and the result was a tangle of legs and arms. Mr Jain was close behind me. And then a coolie plunged across the platform to get to a compartment, and collided with Mr Jain.

Mr Jain rolled over and lost his glasses. I disengaged myself from the women and ran after Daljit who was far ahead, using his fists and elbows to cut a path through the crowd.

He stopped once, turned to see if I was still free, and shouted, "Come on, Rusty! Across the railway tracks!"

He leapt down from the platform, and slipped between two carriages of a waiting train. I followed unwillingly. I have always had a superstitious dread of crossing railway lines, and get nightmares in which I find myself lying helpless (though not bound) on a railway track, while a steam-engine thunders towards me. I have always woken up with the engine about three feet away, but sometimes I wonder what would happen if I failed to wake up at the last moment!

Daljit had already crossed two sets of railway lines, and was climbing the railings on the other side. I looked left, and then right, and then left again, and saw a shunting engine in the distance. It was far away, and I had plenty of time in which to cross the lines and join Daljit. But I was overcome by an irrational fear and sweat broke out on my forehead and on the palms of my hands.

"Come on!" called Daljit urgently.

I took a deep breath, looked straight ahead and made a dash across the tracks. I was so nervous that I tripped and fell across the lines. A feeling of nausea swept over me and the ground seemed to be in the throes of an earthquake. Was my dream going to come true at last? I could still hear Daljit shouting; I could hear the puff-pant of the engine coming closer.

"Come on, Rusty, get up!" Daljit's voice was in my ear now, and I was surprised to find him beside me, tugging at my arm.

His presence gave me confidence. I scrambled to my feet, snatched up my haversack, and ran with him to the embankment. A fence made of corrugated iron sheeting blocked our way. It was about ten feet high and there were no footholds which would enable us to climb it. So we ran along beside the fence until we found an opening which gave on to a goods yard.

We dashed through an open turnstile, and entered a small side street. We kept running, keeping to narrow lanes and alleys, where small mosques, temples, schools and shops jostled with each other, and then found ourselves on a wide thoroughfare, bustling with people and noisy with traffic.

We were in Chandni Chowk, Delhi's famed and historic street of silversmiths.

Interlude in Chandni Chowk

Here, in the crowd of shoppers, pedlars, clerks, urchins, sadhus, jewellers, barbers and pickpockets, we felt fairly safe. The heart of a city is always a good place to get lost in. Fugitives usually make the mistake of fleeing into the countryside, where, being strangers, they are soon noticed. By sheer accident we had come upon the safest place in Delhi.

Tongas, bullock-carts, cycles, rickshaws, and cars new, old and ancient, all struggled for advantage on the road. Any vehicle that had a horn blew it and anything which had a bell jangled it; and if you had neither horn nor bell, you used your vocal chords.

We found a sweet stall, and while Daljit dropped syrupy brown gulab jamuns down his throat, I helped myself to some golden-spangled jalebies.

A sharp shower drove us into the shelter of a verandah. As it began to rain quite heavily, the street rapidly emptied, and soon the throng of people had melted away. A couple of cars churned their way through the rushing water and stray cows continued rummaging in the garbage heaps.

A group of small boys came romping along the street which was now like a river in spate. When they came to a gutter filled with rain water, they plunged in, scream-

ing with laughter. A garland of marigolds, came floating down the middle of the road.

And then the rain stopped suddenly. The sun came out. A paper boat came sailing between my legs.

"Where do we go now?" asked Daljit. "The station isn't safe."

"We must leave Delhi some other way. Meanwhile, let's find a cheap hotel for the night."

"Oh, I've still got over thirty rupees," said Daljit.

"Even with my six, I don't think it will be enough for both of us, not if we are going to buy tickets."

"Then we won't buy tickets," said Daljit.

It didn't take us long to find a hotel. It was called the Great Oriental Hotel, and was just behind the police station. It didn't pretend to be even a third-class hotel, and for five rupees we were given a small back-room which had a window overlooking the godowns of an Afghan spice merchant. The powerful smell of *heeng* came up from the courtyard below.

We were tired and hot, and tossing our belongings to the floor, took turns at the bathroom tap. Then we stretched out on the one cot and slept through the afternoon, oblivious to the noises from the street, the attentions of the insect population in the hotel mattress, and the creaking of the old fan overhead.

It was late evening when we woke up, and we were hungry again. Daljit opened the door and shouted and presently a servant-boy appeared.

"Bring us tea, toast, two big omelettes, and a bottle of tomato sauce," ordered Daljit.

The omelettes, when they arrived twenty minutes later, were tiny. Both had obviously been made from one egg. The sauce had been diluted with water, and the toasts were burnt. The salt was damp, and we had to prise open the salt-cellar to get at it. The pepper, how-

ever, came out in a generous rush and made up the major portion of the meal. As we were still very hungry, we ordered eggs again, boiled eggs this time. No matter how tiny, they would have to be whole.

"Let's go out," said Daljit. "It's stuffy in here."

"I'm still sleepy," I said.

"Then I'll go out for a little while. I may go to the gurdwara."

"All right, but don't get lost."

Daljit left me, and I settled back on the cot, and opened Tagore's *The Gardener* but I didn't read for long because as the evening wore on, I found myself a witness to the great yearly flight of the insects into the cool brief freedom of the night.

Termites and white ants, which had been sleeping through the hot season, emerged from their lairs. Out of every hole and crack, huge winged ants emerged, at first fluttering about heavily, on this, the first and last flight of their lives. There was only one direction in which they could fly, towards the light—towards electric bulbs and street lamps and kerosene lanterns throughout the city. The street lamp beneath our room attracted a massive swarm of clumsy termites, which gave the impression of one thick, slowly revolving body.

It was the hour of lizards. They had their reward for weeks of patient waiting. Plying their sticky pink tongues, they devoured insects swiftly. For hours they crammed their stomachs, knowing that such a feast would not be theirs again for another season. Throughout the entire hot season the insect world prepares for this flight out of darkness into light, and not one survives its bid for freedom.

Drowsy, I closed my eyes, but the sounds of the city's unceasing traffic came through the window Ships and distant ports seemed very far away but so did hills and

mountain streams.

I fell asleep and woke up only when Daljit returned.

"I've solved our problem!" he said, beaming. "We won't bother with the train. I got friendly with a truck driver, and he has offered to take us as far as Jaipur. That's nearly three hundred miles. It will be quite safe to take a train from Jaipur."

"When can your friend take us?"

"The truck leaves at four o'clock in the morning."

"There's no rest for the wicked," I said. "Still the less time we lose the better. It's Wednesday, and my uncle's ship might sail on Saturday. What will we have to pay?"

"Nothing. It's a free ride. The driver is a Sikh, and I persuaded him that we are related to each other through the marriage of my brother-in-law to his sister-in-law's niece!"

On the Road with Mumta

At four the next morning we made our way towards the Red Fort, its ramparts dark against the starry sky. The streets which had been teeming with so much life the previous evening, were now deserted. The street lamps shed lonely pools of light on the pavements. The occasional car glided silently past, but it belonged to another kind of world altogether.

Near the Fort we found a couple of dhabas which were still open. They did business with the truck drivers who slept by day and drove by night.

Our driver, a tall, bearded Sikh loomed over us out of the darkness. He had a companion with him, also a Sikh, who was still in his underwear.

"You can get in at the back," said the driver in his thick Punjabi which I could follow sufficiently well. "We'll be off in a few minutes."

The truck was parked beneath a peepul tree. We pulled ourselves up into the back of the open truck, only to find our way barred by what seemed at first to be a prehistoric monster.

The monster snorted once, stamped heavily on the boards, and sent us tumbling backwards.

"Bhaiyyaji!" cried Daljit to the driver. "There's some kind of animal in here!"

"Don't worry, it's only Mumta," said our friend.

"But what is it doing in here?"

"She is going with us. I am taking her to the market in Jaipur. So get in with her, boys and make yourselves comfortable."

There was now enough light to enable us to take a closer look at our travelling companion. She was a full-grown buffalo from the Punjab.

"An excellent buffalo," said Daljit, who appeared to be familiar with the finer points of these animals. "Notice her blue eyes!"

"I didn't know buffaloes had blue eyes," I said.

"Only the best buffaloes have them," said Daljit. "Blue-eyed buffaloes give more milk than brown-eyed ones."

Fortunately for us, the Sardarji started the truck, and an early morning breeze, blowing across the river, swept away some of the buffalo odour.

We were soon out of Delhi and bowling along at a fair speed on the road to Jaipur. The recent rain had water-logged low-lying areas, and the herons, cranes and snipe were numerous. Fields and trees were alive with strange, beautiful birds: the long tailed king crow, blue jays and weaver birds, and occasionally the great whiteheaded kite, which is said to be Garuda, the god Vishnu's famous steed.

As we travelled further into Rajasthan, the peacocks became more numerous; so did the camels, loping along the side of the road in straight, orderly lines. And, as the vegetation grew less and the desert took over, the people themselves grew more colourful, as though to make up for the absence of colour in the landscape. The women wore wide red skirts, and gold and silver ornaments. They were handsome, tall, fair and strong. The men were tall too and the older among them had flowing white beards.

As the day grew older, and the sun rose higher in the sky, the traffic on the road increased; but our truck driver, instead of slowing down, drove faster. Perhaps he was in a hurry to dispose of the buffalo and soon he was trying to overtake another truck.

The truck in front was moving fast too, and its driver had no intention of giving up the middle of the road. It was piled high with stacks of sugar-cane.

"It's going to be a race!" said Daljit, standing up against the buffalo, in order to get a better view.

The road was not wide enough to take two large vehicles at once, and as the other truck wouldn't make way, ours had to move onto the dusty cart-track. Clouds of dust billowed into the back of the truck, almost suffocating us. We were thrown to the floor-boards as the truck lurched over the ruts in the rough road, and Mumta, getting nervous, almost trampled on us. Then there was a tremendous bump, a grinding of brakes, and we came to a stop.

As the dust cleared, we made out our driver's bearded face gazing anxiously down at us.

"Are you all right?" he asked gruffly.

"I think so," I said.

"Did you overtake the other truck?" asked Daljit.

"No," grunted our friend. "He would not give way. He was a Sikh, too. You had better come in front."

We agreed without any hesitation and his assistant rather grudgingly joined the buffalo.

After a few miles, the driver became friendly and told us that his name was Gurnam Singh.

"Would you like to hear my new horn?" he asked in Punjabi.

"Have we not been hearing it all the time?" I asked in Hindi. We got along well enough.

"You can't hear it well in the back," he said. "That's

why I've brought you here in front. What do you think of it?" he asked, as a shattering sound filled the cabin of the truck.

"It is a fine horn," I said, fingers in my ears. "It could not be louder."

"You can hear it half a mile ahead," said Gurnam Singh proudly, and he blasted off at two young men who were sharing a bicycle. They moved out of the way with alacrity.

"It makes a lot of noise in here, too." I said, and added hastily, for fear of offending him, "not that it matters, of course. . . ."

"Doesn't your horn have more than one tone of voice?" asked Daljit.

I thought this was a bit rude, but Gurnam Singh seemed to welcome the question.

"Two!" he exclaimed. "Male and female. See." And he produced a high note and then a low note, both equally ear-shattering. Ahead of us, a camel ran off the road and into the fields.

"This is a terrific horn," said Gurnam Singh. "I've had it made specially for this truck. No foreign horns for me. They are not loud enough. Indian horns are the best!"

In an interval of comparative quiet, I found myself reflecting on the nature of sound—the unpleasantness of some sounds, and the sweetness of others, and why certain sounds (like those made by motor-horns) can be sweet to some and terrible to others.

"It was made in Old Delhi," continued Gurnam Singh, interrupting my thoughts with further comment on his horn. "Seventy-five rupees only. Made by hand, to my own specifications. There is only one drawback—it mustn't get wet!"

As his fist came down on the horn again, I thought of praying for rain but the sky now being quite clear, I

decided that the prayer would be an unreasonable demand.

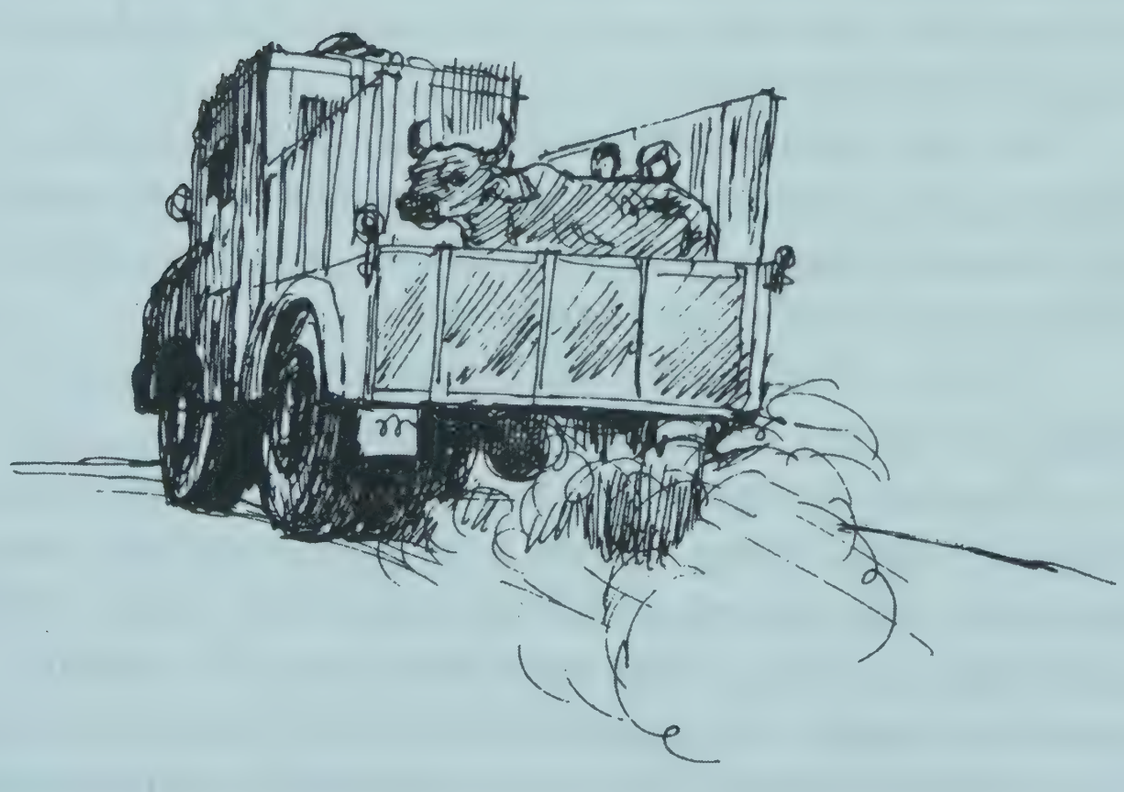
"Ah, but you don't know what it is to have a horn like mine. Try it, friend. Why don't you try it for yourself?"

The question was addressed to me, as I was sitting beside him, Daljit being near the door.

"Oh, that is quite all right," I said. "You have already proved its excellence."

"No, you must try it. I insist that you try it!" He was like a big boy, suddenly generous, determined to share a new toy with a younger brother.

He grabbed my hand and placed it on the horn, and, as I felt it give a little, a thrill of pleasure rushed up my arm. I pressed hard, and a stream of music flowed in and out of the truck. And as I kept pressing down, I experienced the driver's happiness; for, with a horn like his, one felt the power and glory that belongs to the kings of the road.



Dacoits Outside Jaipur

It was getting dark by the time we reached Jaipur, and we were not able to see much of the city. We spent the night in the truck, sleeping in the back with Gurnam Singh. Jaipur nights can be chilly, even in the summer and Gurnam Singh shared his bedding with us. He was accustomed to sleeping in the body of the truck, and was soon asleep, snoring loudly and rhythmically. Daljit and I tossed and turned restlessly. He kicked me several times in the night. The floor of the truck was hard, and retained various buffalo smells.

We had hardly fallen asleep (or so it seemed), when Gurnam Singh woke us up, saying that it was almost four o'clock and that he had to start on his return journey, this time with a load of red sandstone.

"What a life!" said Daljit, sleepily rubbing his eyes with one hand. "I'd hate to be a truck driver."

"One has to live somehow," philosophized Gurnam Singh. "I like driving. I knew how to drive when I was six or seven. The money is not so bad, either. Now, when I get back to Delhi, I will have two days off, which I will spend with my wife and children. Goodbye friends, and if you pass through Delhi again, you will find me beneath the walls of the Red Fort."

We waved to him as he shot off in his truck, making

a great noise and probably waking the local inhabitants. Dogs barked, and a cock began to crow.

We were on the outskirts of the city, facing a large lake. On the other side was open country, bare hills and desert, but we could make out the ruins of a palace or hunting lodge among thorn bushes and babul trees.

"We'll go out there," suggested Daljit. "We can bathe in the lake and rest. Then later in the morning we can come into the city and find out about trains."

We set out along the shores of the lake, and it was a good half hour before we reached the opposite bank.

There was no one in the fields, but a camel moved round and round a well, drawing up water in small trays. Smoke rose from a village, and the sound of a flute carried to us on the still morning air.

It took us about twenty minutes to reach the ruin, which was probably an old hunting lodge put up by a Rajput prince when game was plentiful.

The gate of the lodge was blocked with rubble, but part of the wall had fallen in, and we climbed through the gap and found ourselves in a stone-paved courtyard in the centre of which stood a dry, disused stone fountain. A small peepul tree was growing from the cracks in the floor of the fountain.

We crossed the courtyard to the main structure, and then Daljit stopped and asked, "Do you smell something, Rusty?"

"Yes," I said. "Curry."

This was the last thing we expected to find. It meant the ruin was inhabited. I wondered if we should turn around and leave, but curiosity got the better of us—curiosity, and the smell of the curry! So Daljit and I moved forward, out of the sun and into the shade of a covered verandah. A door led into a dark chamber, from which the curry smells came, and there we stood, hesitat-

ing on the brink of the unknown.

"Well, go ahead," said Daljit.

"I was waiting for you," I said.

Daljit and I stepped into the room together and found it empty.

There was a *choolah* in one corner, and on it stood a pot in which something delicious was cooking, but of the cook there was no sign.

I moved warily towards the fire, lifted the cover from the pot, and sniffed. Chicken curry! Chicken curry in a ruined hunting lodge in the middle of nowhere! We didn't stop to wonder how or why it had got there. There weren't any utensils about, so we dipped our fingers into the curry and I had just got my teeth into a fleshy bit when a pair of strong arms came around from behind and lifted me off my feet.

I was so startled that I dropped the piece of chicken. I struggled to get free from the other's grip but his arms were very powerful. That they were a man's arms and not a ghost's I could tell by the black hair on his forearm. I struggled and kicked, and then someone, another man, loomed up in front of me and grabbed me by the legs. I could hear Daljit struggling with someone else, and tried to shout to him, but a third mysterious presence stuck an oily rag in my mouth. He took my hands and held them while my feet were tied together with a length of rope. I was dumped on the ground, face downwards, with my hands and feet tied. Daljit, I saw, was in much the same position at the other end of the room. There wasn't much we could do. There were at least five men in the room.

"He's only a boy," said one of the men, in the local dialect of Hindi (which to my surprise I found I understood), bending over and examining my face. In the darkness I could not make out his features; but I knew he had a beard, because I felt it on my neck, and his breath

smelt strongly of garlic.

"Boy, man or girl," said another, "whoever tries to make off with our food deserves a good thrashing."

"He is quite fair, this one," said the bearded man.

"Is he a foreigner?"

"No, he's half and half. Let us take them into the courtyard. We will see them better outside."

"No, we mustn't show ourselves. If the villagers spot us in here, word would soon get around. We want to use this place again."

"Light the lamp, then."

The man who set to work lighting a kerosene lantern was the tallest man in the room. As the flame in the lantern shot up, it cast a huge shadow on the wall. This man was a giant, several inches over six feet. He was bare-chested, and his head was close-cropped. His muscles stood out like lumps of iron. Another man behind the bearded one appeared to have been giving the orders. I could not see him as yet.

"Turn him over so that we can have a good look," he said.

The giant rolled me over on the ground, so that I was staring helplessly at the blackened ceiling. A few moments later three faces were staring down at me. At their mercy in that dark, dark room, tied, gagged and trussed up, I was quaking with fear. They had the look of criminals. Probably they were dacoits, using the ruin as a hide-out.

The bearded man had high cheekbones and slanting eyes. The giant did not have a cruel face, in spite of his broad nose and thick, heavy lips. It was the third man who frightened me most. He wasn't big and he wasn't ugly. He was, in fact, rather short, and he was smiling down at me; but it was a smile that sent a shiver down my spine.

"It wasn't very nice of you to help yourself to our chicken," he said in a smooth voice. "Not after Bhambiri here went to so much trouble to steal it!"

"Yes, in the middle of the night," said the giant, who had the quaint name of Bhambiri, which means spinning top. "I had three dogs and half the village chasing me through the fields. But I gave them the slip!" And he chuckled hugely to himself.

"It's all very well to make a joke of it," said the bearded one with a look of gloom. "The chicken isn't important. Why did they really come here? What do you think they know?"

"Let's ask this one," said the short, sinister man. He bent down, stared hard into my eyes and then pulled the rag out of my mouth. No sooner had the gag gone than I felt something cold and hard against my lower teeth. It was like a dentist making a preliminary examination of his patient's teeth, but this short, sinister man was doing it with the point of a dagger.

"Don't talk or shout except when we tell you," he said. Then, taking the knife away he stood back. "Let him sit up a little. Now. You understand me?"

I nodded. Bhambiri came forward, and lifting me with ease, set me up against the wall.

"My wrists are hurting," I said.

Bhambiri made as if to untie my hands, but his leader said, "Don't untie him, you fool," and the giant moved away.

"Now. Tell us what you are doing here."

"We were just looking for a place to rest," I said.

"Twist his arm, Bhambiri."

I don't think the giant meant to twist my arm very hard, but even the slight wrench he gave it made me cry out. He had obviously been a wrestler at some point of his career.

"Don't lie," said the leader. "It's very painful to lie. You've been spying on us."

"We do not know anything about you," I said desperately. "We have only been in Jaipur one night."

"They don't look like spies," said the bearded man. "They're only boys."

"We are on our way to the coast," I said. "We do not have much money."

"So you were about to steal our food," said Bhambiri sternly. A lost meal concerned him more than the possibility of our being police spies.

"Let's see if they have any money on them," said the short one. He went through my pockets and produced the few notes and loose change that I possessed. Then he went to Daljit, still gagged and helpless, took his wallet, examined it and said, "There's thirty or forty here." He put everything into his own pockets.

"Shall I let them go now?" asked Bhambiri.

"No, you idiot, they'll set up an alarm. Finish what's left of the food, and then let's be off."

So we lay there, trussed up for about fifteen minutes, while the dacoits finished their meal. They had no intention of leaving anything, and when they had finished, they licked their fingers and belched. Bhambiri had a wonderful belch. It came from deep down in his belly, gathered volume as it rose to the surface, and then resounded round the chamber as though a gong had been struck. The short one belched very quietly, in his mean way.

"We'll leave them here," he said, giving me a narrow sly smile. "They can have as much rest as they like. They won't be found for a day or two, perhaps. Close the fair boy's mouth again, Bhambiri."

The giant bent over me, shutting off the light from the lantern and though it was dark I thought I had detected

a glimmer of sympathy in his eyes. He thrust the dirty rag back into my mouth and made it fast with a strip of cloth. And then, while he still had me away from the light, he slipped his hands behind my back and swiftly loosened the knot of the rope that bound me.

"All right, let's go," said the leader.

He walked out of the chamber, followed by the others. Bhambiri went out last but he did not look back at us. I waited until I could no longer hear their footsteps and then I slipped my hands out of the rope that Bhambiri had loosened, and wrenched the gag off my mouth. When I had freed my feet, I crawled over to Daljit. I removed his gag, then started on the rope round his wrists.

"How did you get loose?" he asked, as soon as he was able to find his voice.

"Don't talk too loudly," I said. "They might return. Their cooking pots are still here, though they probably belong to someone else."

"But how did you get loose, Rusty?"

"The big fellow freed my hands when the others couldn't see. I think he felt sorry for us."

"God bless his soft heart," said Daljit fervently. "We might have been lying here for days starving to death. Or dying of thirst, whichever happens first."

He sat up as soon as his limbs were free, and began stretching his arms and legs. Then he brought his knees up to his chin and gave me an anxious look.

"What do we do now, Rusty? They've taken our money. We can't go anywhere, forward or backward. We'll have to give ourselves up at the nearest police station."

"They have taken our haversacks, too. Well, if they're dacoits, I suppose it's their business to take what they can. I suppose we should consider ourselves lucky. They

might have murdered us."

"We wouldn't have been their first victims. That short fellow. . . ." Daljit, with a scowl on his face, was considering the possibilities; then, his hands in his pockets, his face brightened. "They weren't so clever, Rusty. They forgot my watch, just imagine, and there's still some change in one of my pockets!"

"Well, that's something," I said. "We won't starve. We can always sell the watch. But if we can get to Jamnagar somehow, without selling it. . . . we should keep it in case of a real emergency."

"Isn't this an emergency?"

"I suppose so. Still. . . ."

"And you think we can go on? You haven't given up yet?"

"What about you?"

"Do you think I'm likely to give up before you? Come on, Rusty, let's get out of here. It's Saturday tomorrow and we have to get to that ship."

A Steal of Clothes

Daljit and I lay stretched out on the floor of a goods wagon, which was open to the sky. The train jogged slowly through the desert, and hot winds blew the sand in upon us. The gritty sand was in our hair and in our eyes and in our mouths. There was no escape from it. Daljit's face, caked with sand, was the same colour as mine. The sun beat down on us and only a small corner of the wagon gave us some shade. We had bought some bananas with what was left of our money, and we munched on them from time to time.

"We'll be half-starved by morning," I said. "I think we should save some of these bananas."

"Morning comes tomorrow," said Daljit. "I'm hungry today. Besides, we'll reach Jamnagar in the morning."

"And if the ship has gone?"

"The ship will be there."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"I don't. I'm just an optimist."

"It will sail any day now. Perhaps it has left already. Daljit, we'll be stuck without any money; what will we do then?"

"Stop worrying, Rusty. Don't be so nervous. If we're in trouble, we'll sell the watch and go back to school and be expelled. No, they won't expel us—they'll lose all my father's money—but if you like, we can run away again."

"That ship had better be there," I said.

"It will be there. We'll be off in it tomorrow. I hope you will come and live with me in Mombasa for some time."

"Oh, I'll probably be too busy travelling with my uncle," I said.

"How wonderful! No more school. I may come with you. Rusty, I don't think business will be very interesting."

"We could see the world together," I said. "What dreamers we are!"

"Well, we are on our way somewhere. As my Grandfather used to say (he was the Grandfather who travelled round the world selling cloth made in the Punjab), 'The best reason for going from one place to another is to see what's in between'."

"He sold cloth in between," I said." He wasn't dreaming like us."

"You're giving up, Rusty."

"No, I'm not."

But it was a hard night's journey. The train was agonizingly slow and stopped at many places. At one small station, a number of sacks filled with what must have been cattle-fodder, were tossed into the wagon, almost burying us in our fitful sleep. But we found they were comfortable to rest on and lay stretched out on top of them until the first light of morning.

As the sky cleared, we knew we were not far from our journey's end. The landscape had undergone a complete change. We had left the desert for the coastal plain.

The tall, waving palms parted, and for the first time in my life I saw the sea.

It was the sea as I had always visualized it, vast, lonely and blue, blue as the sky was blue, and the first ship I saw was a sailing-ship, an Arab dhow, listing

slightly in the mild breeze that blew on to the shore.

The train stopped at a small bridge spanning a stream which wound its way across the plain down to the sea.

We got down here, and waved our thanks to the brakesman who had tolerated our presence on the train. Then we slid down the banks of the stream and hid beneath the bridge until the train moved off again. We didn't want the guard to see us; he was not as tolerant as the brakesman.

When we thought we were alone, we removed our dusty, travel-stained clothes, and waded out into the stream, pushing our way through a tangle of water-lilies. The current was sluggish unlike the swift streams in the hills and the warm water was not as invigorating as the water from the mountains, but it was fresh enough for our purpose, and brought new life into our weary bodies. We thrashed about, splashing and ducking each other, and Daljit, trying to swim underwater, came up with a water-lily clinging to his long hair, which had come undone.

We were in the water for about fifteen minutes, and had lost all awareness of our surroundings. When we climbed back on the bank, our clothes were missing. Daljit's turban was all that remained.

Higher up the bank, three boys clad only in loin-cloths, stood staring down at us. The biggest of them held our clothes.

"Please bring us our clothes," said Daljit good-naturedly in Hindi. "It is kind of you to leave my turban, but I do not wear a turban anywhere except on my head!"

The three boys burst into laughter and turned on their heels, ambling away through the fields.

"Come back!" shouted Daljit.

"Let's go after them," I said.

It was almost a matter of life and death for us. All that

Daljit had on his person was his turban and his watch, but I didn't even have that much. We scrambled up the bank and ran in desperate pursuit of the village boys. But they had a good start, and knew their way through the fields. They had reached the village while we were still struggling through the fields, tripping over culverts and irrigation ditches. A shower of pebbles, thrown at us from behind a wall, brought us to a stop.

"Let's try persuasion," I said. Cupping my hands to my mouth, I shouted, "Please give us back our clothes, we do not have any others!" I took the trouble to use my best Hindi.

The only response was a large stone, which flew past my ear.

"I don't think they speak Hindi here," I said. "Shall I try English? I don't know any other languages."

"Not English! It will only result in more stones. I suppose they speak Gujarati. . . . and I don't know any."

A man appeared at the edge of the field, waving a stick at us and shouting incomprehensively.

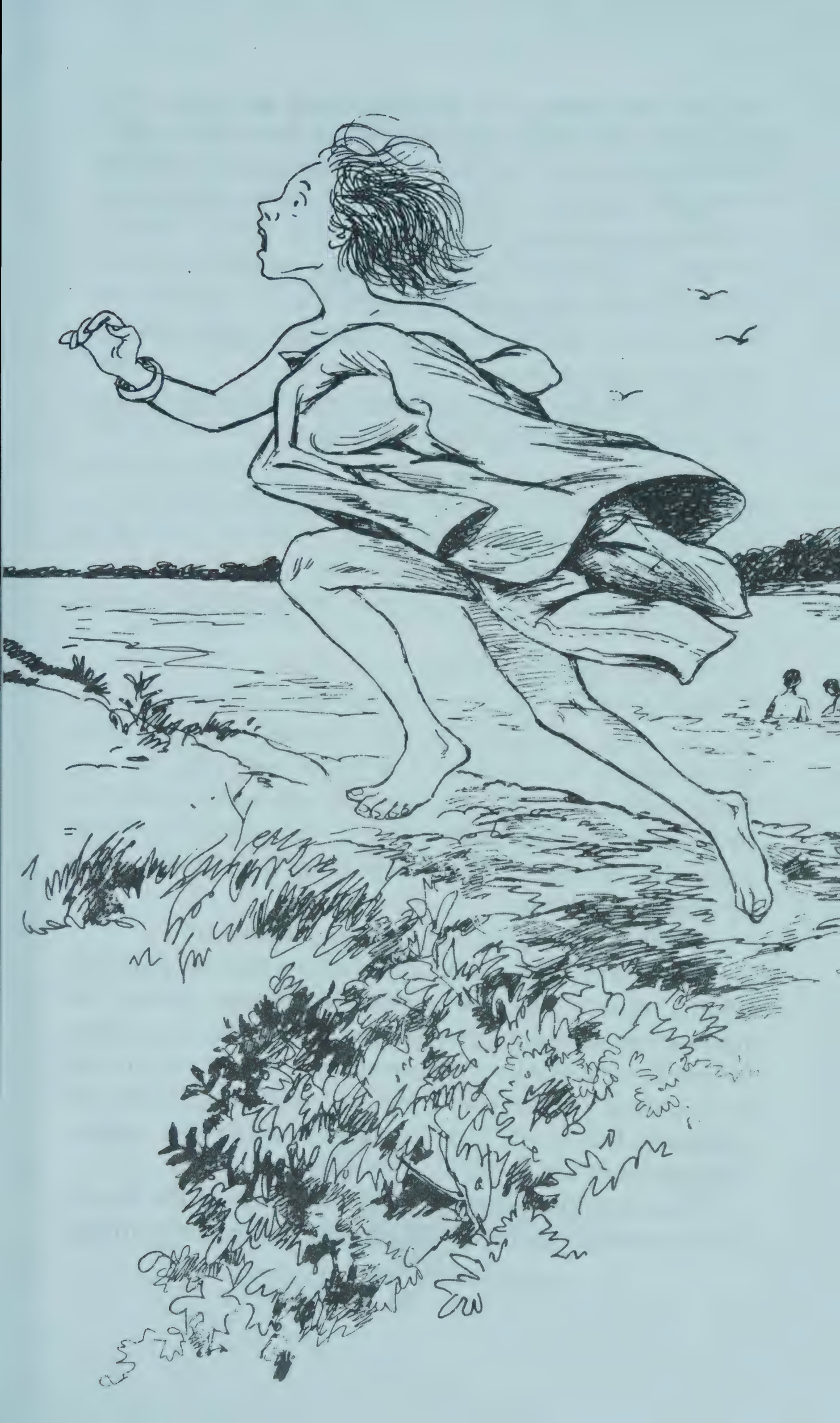
"What do you think he's saying?" asked Daljit.

"How should I know? He probably wants us to get off his land."

"Well, we're not going without our clothes."

"I think we are," I said. "Here come the dogs!"

Several village dogs, baying like the hounds of the Baskervilles came bounding towards us, followed by two men with sticks and several boys with stones. Daljit and I lost no time in presenting them with a rear view, and we made off through the fields as fast as our weary limbs would take us. It wasn't until we had crossed the stream again that we paused for breath. The villagers did not follow us across, and we presumed that we were now on someone else's land. The village men shook their sticks at us and we shook our fists at them; but we were still



without our clothes. We left the stream and took shelter in a grove of mango trees. There, we were left alone.

"And now what do we do?" Daljit wanted to know.

"We'll walk on to Jamnagar," I said. "It won't be far."

"Wearing nothing, you mean?"

"Why not? We'll wait until it gets dark."

"And when morning comes?"

"Oh, we'll find something. We can sell your watch and buy some clothes."

"I can't imagine walking into a shop wearing nothing but a watch, which we then offer for sale."

"We can pretend to be sadhus," I said. "Or at least the disciples of sadhus, chelas. It's the fashion these days. Only the best sadhus go about naked. We might even be given free board and lodging for the night."

"And by morning we find the ship has sailed without us."

"I hadn't thought of that. . . ."

But as we sat there, discussing our predicament, we saw two men, probably railway-workers, walking down to the stream on our side of it. They wore trousers and shirts and shoes unlike the farmers who wore dhotis. At first I thought they were going to the stream to drink water, but when I saw them removing their clothes, I sat up with a wild hope.

"Daljit," I said urgently, "do you see them?"

"Of course I see them." He was not slow in grasping what I meant. "Yes, this is our only chance, Rusty. We must show no mercy, remember! This world is no place for gentlemen like us. We must change our ways, and do as the local people do! They will probably blame the villagers. But move quietly. Let's keep to the bushes. They mustn't see us!"

Crawling along on all fours, heedless of the thorns that scratched our bare flesh, we approached the stream

again, at the approximate place where the men were bathing. They were making a fair noise as they romped about in the water like boys (bathing in the open seems to make adults quite skittish, I've noticed, perhaps because they are back in the element from which mankind first emerged as playful amoebae!) and did not see or hear us. Their clothes lay in an untidy heap a few yards away.

"I'll get them," whispered Daljit. "If they see me, they'll mistake me for a boy from the village. But if they see you, we've had it!"

He dashed out from the bushes with great speed (and if he had shown the same spirit in school, he would have made a good athlete), swept up all the clothes in his arms, and scrambled back to me.

"Brilliant!" I whispered. "They didn't see a thing."

We didn't wait for them to discover their loss (though we were sorely tempted to do so), but took to our heels and fled back through the mango grove.

We crossed the railway tracks and ran across open country until we got to an old well; and there, in the generous shade of an ancient banyan tree, we got into our new clothes, which were several sizes too big for us.

Jamnagar!

Two hours later we were in Jamnagar.

We stopped near a small tea-shop and watched other people eating laddoos and bhelpuri. We couldn't even afford a coconut.

"Where is the harbour?" I asked the shopkeeper.

"Two miles from here," he replied.

"Are there any ships in port?" I asked, relieved.

"What do you want with a ship?"

"What does anyone want with a ship?"

"Well, there's only one, and it sails today, so you had better hurry if you want to go away on it."

"Let's go," said Daljit.

"Wait!" said a young man who was lounging against the counter. "It will take you almost an hour to get there if you walk. I will take you in my ghari." He pointed to a shabby pony-cart close by. The pony did not look as though it wanted to go anywhere.

"My pony is fast!" said the young man, following our glances. "Never go by appearances. She may look tired but she runs like a champion! Get in, friends, I will charge you only one rupee."

"We don't have any money," I said. "We'll walk."

"Eight annas, then," he said. "Eight annas and a glass of tea. Jump in, friends!"

"All right," said Daljit. "There's no time to lose. Eight annas and buy your own tea."

We climbed into the ghari, and the youth jumped up in front and cracked his whip. The pony lurched forward, the wheels rattled and shook, and we set off down the bazaar road at a tremendous trot.

"I didn't know you had eight annas left," I said.

"I don't," said Daljit. "But we'll worry about that later. Your uncle can pay!"

As soon as we were out of the town and on the open road to the sea, the pony went faster. She couldn't help doing so, as the road was downhill. The wind blew my hair across my eyes, and the salty tang of the sea was in the air.

Daljit shook me in his excitement.

'We will soon be at the harbour," he said. "And then away at last!"

The driver called out endearments to his pony, and, exhilarated by the sea breeze and the comparative speed of his carriage, he burst into song. As we turned a bend in the road, the sea-front came into view. There were several small dhows close to the shore, and fishing-boats were beached on the sand. The fishermen were drying their nets while their children ran naked in the surf. A steamer stood out at sea and though I could not make out its name from that distance, I was sure it was the *Lucy*.

The ghari stopped at the beginning of the pier, and we tumbled out and began running along the pier. But even as we ran, it became clear to me that the ship was moving away from us, moving out to sea. Its propeller sent small waves rippling back to the pier.

"Captain!" I shouted. "Uncle Jim! Wait for us!"

A lascar, sailor, standing in the stern, waved to us; but that was all. I stood at the end of the pier, waving my hands and shouting into the wind.

"Captain Uncle Jim! Wait for me!"

Nobody answered. The seagulls, wheeling in the wake of the steamer, seemed to take up the cry—"Captain, Captain. . . ."

The ship drew further away, gaining speed. And still I called to it in a hoarse, pleading voice.

Yokohama, San Diego, Valparaiso, London, all slipping away for ever. . . .

We stood by ourselves on the pier, in the late afternoon, with gulls wheeling around us, mocking us with their calls. A phrase from one of Uncle Jim's letters ran through my head. "First call Aden, then Suez and up the Canal. . . ." But for me there was only the long journey back, the indignation of my guardian, the boredom of the school-room.

Daljit had been silent. When at last I forced myself to look at him, I was surprised to see him smiling. He did not seem at all downcast.

"We've arrived too late," he said. "We've come hundreds of miles, and we're five minutes too late!"

"Never mind! Everything has been for nothing. All our plans. . . ."

"All our dreams!"

"What's wrong with dreams?"

"Nothing. As long as they don't come true, we can keep on dreaming. We'll go back to school and we'll have other dreams."

"I didn't know you were a philosopher, Daljit. And how do you think we are going to get back to school? Even if you sell your watch, it won't be enough. I'm fed up. I don't want to go anywhere, I'll sit on this pier until my uncle returns."

"How long will you have to wait?"

"One or two years," I said, smiling.

"Don't worry about getting back," said Daljit. "When

we ran away, it had to be a secret, but it isn't a secret any more. We'll sell the watch, pay the ghariwallah, and send a telegram!"

"To the Headmaster?"

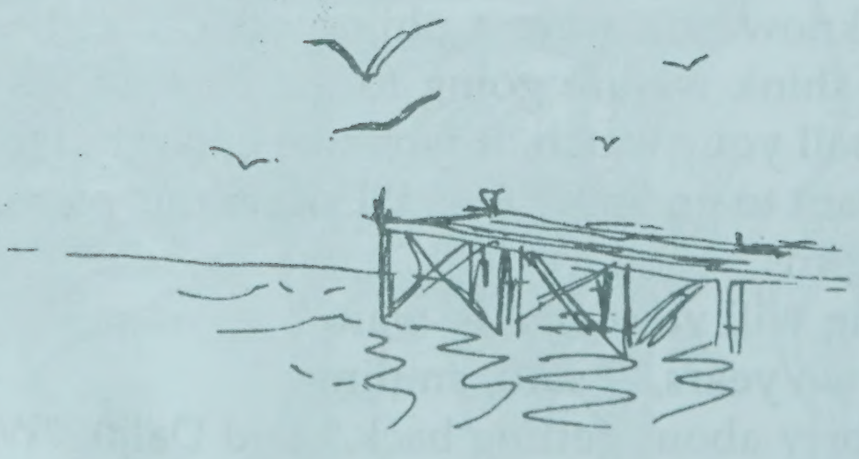
"No. To an uncle of mine in Bombay. He can come and fetch us in his car. And he can take us back to school in his car. We'll travel in comfort this time! We'll eat chicken and ice-cream all the way. We'll enjoy ourselves for a few days!"

"Yes," I said. "We won't have anything to enjoy when we get back."

I didn't say much as we walked back to the ghari. My thoughts were far away. I reminded myself that next year, some time, Uncle Jim would return in the *Lucy*, and then I wouldn't make another mistake. I'd be on the ship long before it sailed.

And so I stopped and stared out to sea for the last time. The steamer looked very small in that vast expanse of ocean.

This year, next year, some time. . . . Yokohama, Valparaiso, San Diego, London. . . .



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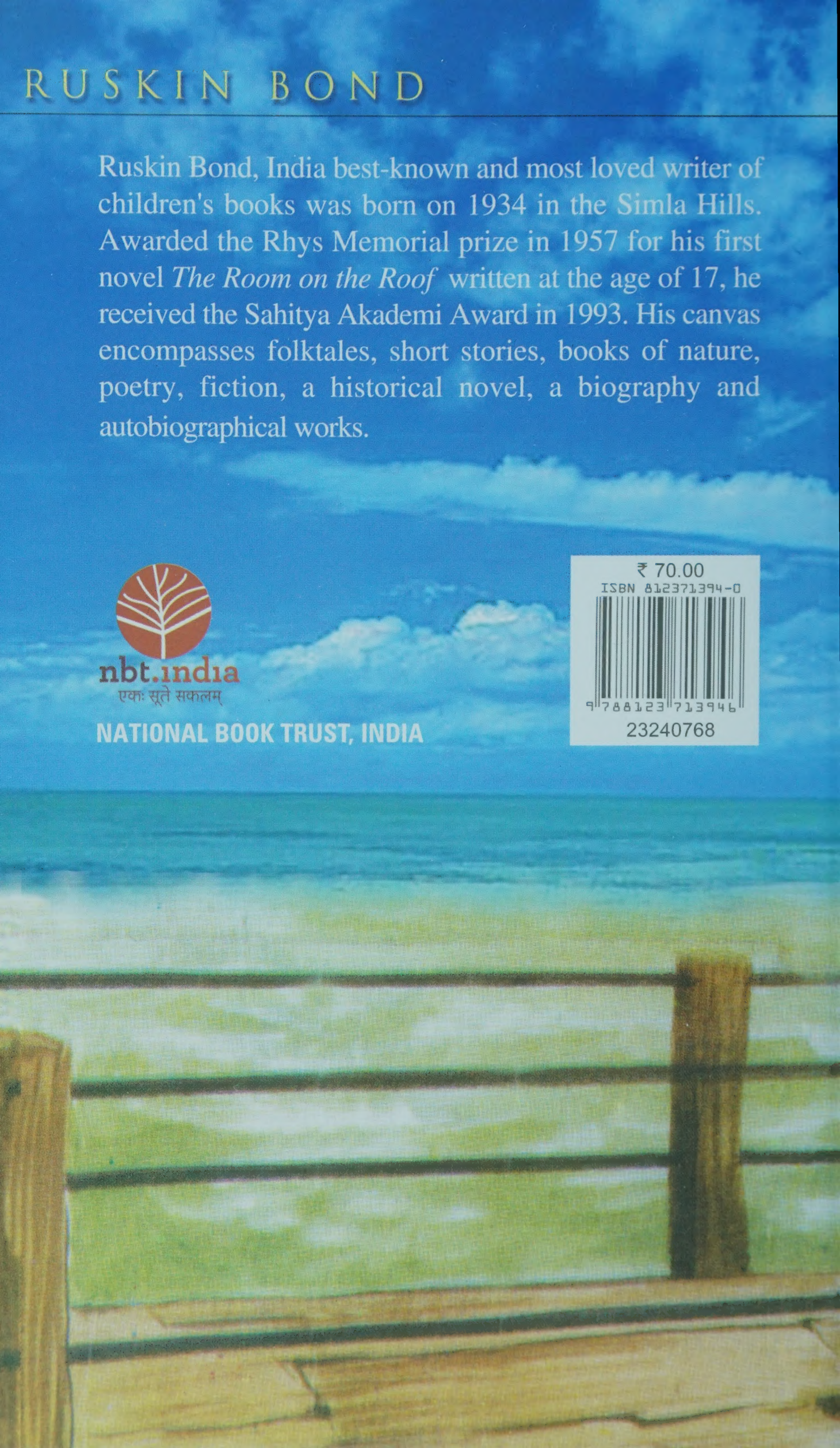

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